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HELEN CAMERON.

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VOL. I.

HELEN CAMERON:

From Grub to Butterfly.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "MARY STANLEY; OR, THE SECRET ONES."

"I held it truth, with him who sings
To one clear harp in diverse tones,
That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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HELEN CAMERON.

BOOK I.

THE GRUB.

CHAPTER I.

A FAULTY HEROINE.

“I can, Petruchio, help thee to a wife
With wealth enough, and young, and beauteous;
Brought up as best becomes a gentlewoman:
Her only fault (and that is faults enough)
Is that she is intolerable curst. . . .”

SHAKSPERE: *Taming of the Shrew.*

HOUSES have characters as well as men. There are houses pure and houses foul; houses hospitable and houses inhospitable; houses which one loves, and houses which one can't but hate; houses where we should like to be when sickness comes or sorrow falls, and houses which, even in the sunshine of health and joy, we shun like the plague; houses (say some) where evil spirits, and houses, doubtless, where all good angels, love to dwell. I, for my part, have become so much

attached to some houses, that to leave them has been like parting from an old friend. Moreover, as with men, the character of a house is sometimes written on its face. There are houses which smile on you, and houses which frown on you; houses which wink at you playfully, and houses which grin at you wickedly; houses which invite you to enter, and houses which scare you away; houses which you fall in love with at first sight, and houses which you instinctively wish never to see again.

It was a house in Pea Street; not the best street in St. Petersburg, but undoubtedly the best house in the street: a house that had a character of its own, and showed it in its face; a roomy, comfortable, hospitable house; a house that one would like to live in, if one had the means, for it needed no end of money to keep up such an establishment. The out-houses alone had room enough for a large English family of middle rank. Everywhere a look of comfort and of wealth. The rooms all large and lofty, and handsomely furnished. Many signs all around that it did not belong to a Russian family. Many things, which, if they had tongues, would

have said, and did say to all who had eyes to see: "We belong to an Englishman,"—I beg the pardon of the Scot,—“to a Briton.” But there is one room, the breakfast-room, which you are specially invited to enter: large as it is, one of the cosiest rooms you ever saw; furnished in the English style, always reminding the family of “home:” in truth, the favourite room; many other rooms larger and grander, but this one always chosen when the family were alone.

But what to make of that family? You see them at breakfast now: look at them and guess; taking them in the order of their age, beginning with the oldest. An elderly lady, about sixty, very plain, but beautiful in spite of it: a look of refinement about her; the soul shining out of her bright black eyes; an air of command in her large nose, but a nervous and fidgety manner at loggerheads with it. An undersized gentleman, not far from forty: face, not quite so plain as the lady's, and figure thin and wiry; both face and figure betokening a quick, keen, agile nature—a nature that could easily outstrip difficulties even when it could not face them. A young lady of surpassing beauty, whose

soft, round, creamy, pouting, almost babyish face was evermore giving the lie to her tall, large, well-developed, womanly figure; the former pointing to fifteen, and the latter to twenty-five, leaving it to the onlooker to settle the balance of probabilities between the two, and to fix on some intermediate stage on the border-land as her real age.

What now of the relation between the three? Mother and children? The reverence with which the gentleman treats the elder lady might seem to support that hypothesis. But the nervous, fidgety manner of the lady herself, and the masses of thick, heavy curls which lie flat on her brow and cheeks, point to (ancient) maidenhood rather than to motherhood. Moreover, the gentleman seems to treat the younger lady with the same reverence; and would he demean himself thus to a sister so much younger than himself? A lover? But listen to their talk, and judge for yourself.

The gentleman, who had been reading his letters (his habit at breakfast), looked up, and, turning to the younger lady, said, in a deferential, almost humble tone, as though deprecating her wrath :

“I am very sorry, Helen, dear; but I can’t take you to the Feast of the Jordan to-day.”

Helen’s beautiful face, radiant the moment before, suddenly clouded over. Easy to see that a storm was brewing there.

“It is a shame!” she cried; “you promised.”

“Yes, my darling; but I have just received a letter which compels me to retract my promise.”

“When we are dressed, and ready to go!” continued Helen, growing more angry; “and the Emperor is to be there and all the Court!”

The elder lady had not spoken yet. She sat looking from the one to the other in her usual nervous, fidgety way. But now she put in a word—speaking very fast, delivering her clauses and sentences by jerks and starts, in a disjointed way, highly suggestive of dashes.

“But you will have—other opportunities—Helen, darling—of seeing them all,” she said.

“Yes, but I want to see them now.”

“I am really very sorry, dear Helen——” began the gentleman in his deferential tone.

Helen interrupted him in a way which was anything but respectful:

“That is what you always say when you do anything particularly disagreeable.”

“ But in this case it can’t be helped.”

“ I don’t see why.”

“ Business, my dear——”

“ You could put off the business.”

“ Impossible, my dear Helen: why, it might cost me ten thousand pounds.”

“ And you’d break your word for ten thousand pounds !”

How to parry this home-thrust? The gentleman hung down his head over the letter—perhaps to see if he could reconcile his interests with his promise. Meanwhile the elder lady again came to his rescue. In her usual rapid, jerky manner, she exclaimed :

“ Really, Helen, dear—you are going—too far. And *you* would give—ten thousand pounds—for a show !”

“ Oh, papa is rich enough to afford it.”

That gentleman her father ! Queer enough !

“ Ridiculous !” cried the gentleman.

He looked up from the letter; and, for the first time, there was an air of resolution on his face. Helen had been watching him narrowly with her lovely blue eyes. O, those eyes ! So lustrous, and yet so soft ! So deep, and at the same time so staunch

and true ! If there had been nothing else in her face to speak for her, I think, in spite of present appearances, I would have staked my faith in her on the strength of those eyes. As she sat looking at her father, a shade of sadness came over those eyes, deepening the interest which they awakened. Clearly she was very much disappointed. She thought for a moment : no more to be gained on her former line of attack ; and she was cool enough by this time to be able to change her tactics.

“Why should not Miss Meldrum take me there ?” she asked abruptly, after a long pause.

“Impossible !” answered the gentleman : “there will be such a crush that no ladies should go without a gentleman. Miss Meldrum will have enough to do to look after herself.”

The elder lady had become more nervous and fidgety than ever. In a high state of excitement, which made her manner more jerky than usual, she said :

“Miss Meldrum begs—to be excused. She will not—make herself responsible—for any mad pranks—which Miss Helen Cameron—may choose to play.”

“Nay, dear Aunt Milly, I will promise to be as quiet as a lamb,” said Helen in a coaxing tone, fixing her large blue eyes beseechingly on Miss Meldrum.

A gleam of humour shot forth from the sparkling black eyes which she encountered.

“I fear Miss Cameron—would break her word—for less than—ten thousand pounds.”

“That is too bad!” cried Helen, looking hurt.

“Forgive me, my darling,” said Miss Meldrum, softened in a moment: “I know you would not—knowingly break your word—for the whole world. But, lightly promise—lightly——”

What more she said, or might have said, was drowned by the gentleman’s voice. He had not listened to the foregoing few sentences, but had seemed busy studying the letter. Suddenly he lifted up his head, and said:

“Now that that matter is settled——”

“But it is not settled, papa, dear,” answered Helen: “I hold you to your promise.”

Helen went up to Mr. Cameron. Perhaps he knew what was coming: he seemed to be waiving her away with his hand. But she threw her arms round his neck, and kissed

him with her pouting lips in a way which was irresistible. Mr. Cameron looked puzzled, and clearly did not know what to do.

“Eh? eh?” was all he could utter.

“You’ll take me, won’t you, darling papa?” said Helen. “That’s a dear good papa!”

“Really, my darling, this is no joke,” answered Mr. Cameron. “Just think, ten thousand pounds!”

Another gleam of humour shot through Miss Meldrum’s black eyes. She said smiling:

“Yes, Mr. Cameron—ten thousand pounds—for a kiss!”

“Do now; that’s a darling papa!”

“Helen, my dear child, you surely don’t wish your father to make a fool of himself?”

“But you promised, you know; and I have been looking forward to it so, dear papa!”

Mr. Cameron looked perplexed: was he really hesitating? It was becoming so clear that his daughter was the ruling spirit in the house, that, ridiculous as it may seem, I believe he might have yielded had there not been a diversion in his favour. It came in the shape of a handsome open sledge, drawn by two

magnificent English bays, which dashed into the courtyard. The windows of the breakfast-room looked out on the yard; and, as Miss Meldrum sat facing the windows, she was the first to see the sledge.

“Here is Mr. Frederick Randal,” she said.

Helen clapped her hands with childish glee. She said nothing, but thought:

“Fred will take me to the feast.”

It was not long before a handsome young gentleman, dressed in the height of fashion, entered the room. The impression which he made, at first sight, was pleasing. There was an open look about his face, and a freedom about his somewhat dashing manner, which greatly took with most. If you had studied his face more deeply, I think you would have felt that something was wanting. If the sweetness which shone through his soft brown eyes had been backed by a little more strength; if the culture spent on his dark curly locks had been more freely bestowed upon his mind; if the high opinion, which he clearly had of himself, had had a broader background of truth to rest upon;—I daresay he would have become a more shining member of society.

He walked forward like one free of the

house. No need to say what he thought of the lovely girl clinging to her father. No room to doubt that he envied Mr. Cameron, and grudged him those caresses which she bestowed so lavishly.

“I appeal to you, Fred,” said Mr. Cameron, after the greeting was over: “is Helen’s proposal reasonable?”

And he explained the case. Frederick Randal hesitated a moment. Young as he was, he was already a diplomatist; and he had strong reasons for wishing not to displease either father or daughter. Whatever his opinion may have been, it was locked up in his own breast. That he had an opinion there could be no doubt. As a merchant, who knew the value of money, he must have held at its true worth Helen’s proposal coolly to throw away ten thousand pounds. Nay, it is doubtful whether Helen Cameron herself, with all her beauty, would have been quite so beautiful in his eyes, had she not been heiress to her father’s wealth. But a ray of anger, shot from those lovely blue eyes, was the dread of his life. So, like a coward, he tried to steer between the two, and said, not at all answering Mr. Cameron’s question, you see :

“Do you not think, sir, that it would solve the difficulty, if I took Helen to the Feast?”

He was wise enough not to mention that he had come for the purpose of taking her, if he might; that he had brought the magnificent pair of thoroughbred English bays in honour of Helen Cameron; that he had expressly ordered Epheem, the coachman, to use the handsome new silver-mounted harness; that, not content with Epheem's usual carefulness, he had himself gone down to see that the turn-out was as dashing as the establishment could afford. In not saying a word of all this, he meant to kill two birds with one stone: he would refrain from arousing Mr. Cameron's suspicions, and at the same time earn Helen's gratitude by seeming to come to her rescue. At a glance he saw that he had accomplished the latter object at least. He was rewarded by a look from those lovely blue eyes, which assured him that, by one clever stroke of diplomacy, he had accomplished the work of months of more toilsome wooing.

As to Mr. Cameron, he looked grave for a moment, seemed to hesitate, and then answered:

“Of course Miss Meldrum will go with you.”

Now Miss Meldrum's honest face had not exactly entered into the sketch which Fred had chalked out of the morning's arrangements. A shade passed over his own. Easy enough to see that Mr. Cameron's suggestion was not the most pleasing that might have been made. But how decline it? He thought a while, and then said :

“Of course I should be glad to take Miss Meldrum; but, unfortunately, there is no room for more than two in my sledge.”

It was Miss Meldrum's turn to be displeased. She did not care a fig for the Feast of the Jordan; not she! But it is not a pleasant thing, even for the most long-suffering of old maids, always to be thought in the way, and roughly jostled aside. Miss Meldrum was one of the best-tempered of old maids. But she was flesh and blood after all: there are points beyond which human long-suffering will not hold out; and it is as well not to reckon too much on its india-rubber qualities. The meek Miss Meldrum tossed up her head, shook her jet-black curls, and said, in her jerkiest and most nervous manner :

“Pray, don't think—of me! I believe—I am always—in the way!”

Mr. Cameron, without taking any notice of this outburst, quietly answered the young man

“That is easily remedied, my dear fellow ; you must take my large sledge.”

Young Randal was silent. He was thinking of the contrast between Mr. Cameron’s old-fashioned sledge and his own dashing turn-out, which, he had fondly hoped, would make quite a sensation in the fashionable company assembled at the Feast of the Jordan. “That ramshackle affair,” as he irreverently called it, had certainly not entered into “the sketch” which he had chalked out. That unlucky vehicle would, at one touch, destroy the romance of the jaunt. He had meant to drive alone with beautiful Helen in one of the handsomest sledges which Russian coach-maker had ever turned out. Instead of that, to drive in a huge, cumbersome old conveyance, accompanied by a watchful duenna in the shape of a nervous old maid ! It was not the same thing. But how to avoid it ? He could not think of any decent pretext, and, in his despair, appealed to Helen. Would she not prefer his handsome new sledge ? Her answer was the unkindest cut of all :

“I care not how I go.”

"But with that unwieldy affair we shall never be able to get there," said Randal.

"Oh, I'll answer for Meeshka carrying you to the Feast," answered Mr. Cameron laughing.

Meeshka was Mr. Cameron's coachman.

"Ay, but what part of the crowd?" persisted Fred; "the tail, most likely."

"I engage that he shall take you to the very head," answered Mr. Cameron.

What could Randal say after that? He was at his wit's end. Did not Mr. Cameron wish him to go alone with Helen? Why? Did he not relish the young man for a son-in-law? If so, why? True, Helen Cameron seemed likely to become one of the richest heiresses in Russia. But Frederick Randal's father was reckoned the wealthiest English merchant in St. Petersburg. The firm of Randal & Co., in which both father and son were partners, was the oldest and most flourishing in Russia. Where could Mr. Cameron hope to find a more suitable match for his daughter? Why, then, object? Was there a secret in the case? Such were the thoughts which passed through young Randal's mind, as he glanced uneasily at Mr. Cameron's face. He could see nothing there

but stern resolve. Quite useless to try to move a man that never changed his mind except when Helen stormed or wheedled him. So Fred made a virtue of necessity, and fell in, or seemed to fall in, with the hateful plan.

Mr. Cameron rang the bell, and sent Meeshka orders to prepare "the ramshackle affair." Fred went out soon after, to despatch his own coachman, as he said. Presently Meeshka sent word to say that one of the horses was lame and was not in a fit state to go out that day. Had Fred tampered with the coachman? That was the thought which shot through Mr. Cameron's head. He hastily went down to the stable, looking rather serious. Sure enough there was the horse bleeding under the fetlock. What was the matter? Meeshka was not sure; but thought that the blacksmith, who had shod the horse the day before, must have bungled over the business, and driven a nail into the flesh. Mr. Cameron cast a keen glance at Fred, who stood in the yard talking to Epheem; but he looked so cool and unconscious, that the thought of his being guilty seemed absurd.

What was to be done? Could not Randal's horses be yoked to the big sledge? Well,

they could ; but whether they would behave, as horses ought to behave, was another question. Meeshka thought it would be unwise : they were so frisky, and so unused to a huge, unwieldy vehicle like that, that they might kick and plunge ; and he, Meeshka, for one, would not undertake to drive them in a crowd such as might be expected at the Feast of the Jordan. Perhaps Epheem, Fred's coachman, would ? Epheem looked at his master's face, and took his cue at once. At the best of times he found it hard to manage those spirited English brutes ; but, in a strange unwieldy vehicle, and in a noisy crowd, he could not answer for the consequences. And so it happened that Frederick Randal and Helen Cameron went alone to the Feast of the Jordan.

CHAPTER II.

THE FEAST OF THE JORDAN.

“O blessed streams! Either ye do prevent
And stop our sinnes from growing thick and wide,
Or else give tears and drown them as they grow.”

HERBERT: *Holy Baptisme.*

MR. CAMERON'S father had been for many years head clerk in the famous house of Meldrum and Meldrum, at St. Petersburg. He had so won the confidence of his employers, that latterly everything had been intrusted to his management. On the failure of that firm in the great panic of 18—, he had set up in business for himself, taking his son (also a clerk with Meldrum and Meldrum) into partnership with him; and so well had he managed his cards, that nearly all the business of Meldrum and Meldrum had passed into the hands of Cameron and Son, which was, by this time, one of the leading English houses in St. Petersburg, keeping the old name, though the old gentleman had been dead some years.

It was rumoured that, while still a clerk with Meldrum and Meldrum, young Mr. Came-

ron, as he was then called, had "paid his addresses" to Miss Agnes Randal, Frederick's aunt, and had been scornfully rejected; whether by the young lady herself, or by her father, said rumour did not clearly say. A daughter of the great house of Randal & Co. to throw herself away upon a poor Scotch clerk! Out of the question! When the young man had become a partner with his father, it was said that Randal & Co. would no longer have scorned an alliance with Cameron and Son. But the day of grace was then past. Whether "young Mr. Cameron" were not aware of the gracious change which had come over the spirit of Randal & Co., or still smarted too much from their former scorn, he did not renew his offer, but bestowed his hand and heart (his hand, at least) on Miss Isabella Meldrum, a daughter of defunct Meldrum and Meldrum. The marriage was said not to have been a happy one. If report were true, Miss Isabella, a noted beauty, was wilful, wayward, and coquettish; and, after nearly plaguing him out of his life, had plagued herself out of her own, and, leaving him a legacy of her likeness, in the person of little Helen Cameron, had gone from this world into another, where it is

to be hoped that wayward, plaguing coquettes are wholly unknown.

As Mr. Cameron was by this time one of the richest merchants in St. Petersburg, there were several young ladies who would willingly have undertaken the task of bringing up little Helen, with the rank and title of Mrs. Cameron. But, whether Mr. Cameron thought he had been plagued enough for one lifetime, or whether he could find no second mate to suit his taste, he disappointed them all. Some said, that, in spite of the past, he was still true to Agnes Randal; but that young lady was then in England, keeping house for a brother. After much thought, Mr. Cameron begged Miss Emily Meldrum, another daughter of defunct Meldrum and Meldrum, and first cousin to Helen's mother, to take charge of Helen's education. The choice was, in many ways, a happy one: Miss Meldrum, on the whole, discharged her duties ably as well as conscientiously, and was like a mother to Helen. But there was one thing lacking, which spoilt everything else: she never could acquire any authority over the girl. In her defence, it must be said that very few women *could* have mastered Helen. The natural result was, that

she was a spoilt child. She grew up to be as wilful, wayward, and coquettish, as her mother. There were some noble traits in her character. She was capable of great things : it was in her to become a great woman. But all her good qualities were overborne by her faults.

As she grew up to be the very image of her mother, it was curious to watch the way in which her father regarded her. She was so utterly unlike him, that she might have belonged to another species ; and one can easily fancy that he looked on her as a contemplative hen might look on a duckling which she had unwittingly hatched. He could scarcely believe himself to be the father and author of so much beauty. At times, he would gaze at her earnestly, and, seeing not a trace of himself in the beautiful Helen, and but too many traces of "the plague of his life," would turn away with a sigh, and try to forecast her future. Ah, if he could have guessed what awaited him ! That he loved her dearly, there could be no doubt. Yes, dearly : at times, doting over her with almost womanly tenderness ; at others, clinging to her with passionate devotion as (in spite of his wealth) his only treasure in life. In company, what struck one

most was, that he was proud of her. But his was not that "perfect love" which "casteth out fear." You could not have seen them long together without remarking that he stood in awe of her. He seldom could withstand her outbursts of sauciness and self-will. She seemed likely to become, like her mother before her—the plague of his life. Certainly she gave him more and more trouble every year. Often and often he made up his mind to exert his authority; but hitherto he had been thoroughly baffled. With all her wilfulness and waywardness, she was so lovable, and so coaxing in her ways, that, when she found she could not resist his authority, she overcame him by her caresses.

He often questioned himself: Had he done wisely in not marrying again? Would not a mother's (even a step-mother's) influence have been the best discipline for such a girl? If Miss Agnes Randal had only been at St. Petersburg! She, with her rare mingling of sweetness and strength, would have been the very woman to keep Helen in check. Nay, as it turned out, would it not have been wise even to gladden the heart of one of the Misses Somebody, Nobody, and Anybody (all of whom

were so fond of "the darling"), by making a present of a new mamma to Helen? Too late now! She would kick against the pricks as few ladies could kick: no four-legged brute could beat her in that accomplishment. The only hope of salvation for her now lay in the chance of her loving a strong-minded man who could master her: for the latent capacity of love was strong within her; and, where she loved at all, she would have loved with her whole heart and soul. No such man had approached her yet. Crowds of worshippers were indeed at her feet: for she was the acknowledged belle of the English community at St. Petersburg; and the young *attachés* from the English Embassy, as well as the young English merchants of her own rank, offered incense at her shrine. She liked to be admired; was proud of the sensation she made. She had flirted, as beautiful girls who are courted by all will do, with a good many; but, unluckily, she had not lost her heart to any one, and, as far as appearances went, was not likely to do so soon.

Perhaps she liked Frederick Randal as well as any. But, if you look at them now, as they drive along to the Feast of the Jordan, you will think that she did not give him much

encouragement. Fred was so wrapped up in the thought of his own happiness, that, for the time, he could do without it. Enough for him to be by her side. Many eyes were cast on her; and many hearts envied him. The greatest beauties of St. Petersburg were at the Feast; but he felt that the loveliest of them all was by his side. He was proud of his companion; proud of driving alone with her. As for her, she soon gave him a sample of her sauciness. He had just asked her:

“Are you not glad, Helen, that we have no prim old maid to mar our pleasure?”

A box on the ear would have pleased Randal better than the answer he received:

“None but a silly young coxcomb would think of calling Miss Meldrum a prim old maid.”

“That is all the thanks I get!”

“If you look for thanks, I thank you. There now: you have got your thanks; and much good may they do you. Thanks! I thought you brought me here to please yourself. I really thought it gave you pleasure!”

She spoke in the most sarcastic tone and manner. Fred was on the horns of a dilemma. No escaping Helen's merciless logic. Could he advance his suit by saying that it gave

him no pleasure to be in her company? How to answer her? He felt awkward as he began:

“Of course it gives me pleasure; but——”

“Oh, it does—does it? And yet you expect to be rewarded for pleasing yourself! Very fine! Why, the young men are growing quite chivalrous and self-sacrificing!”

“This is unkind, after the years of devotion——”

“Years of devotion! Why, to be sure, you are becoming quite an old man. And my hair is beginning to be ‘silvered o’er’—with grey. If somebody does not take compassion on me soon, I shall die ‘a prim old maid.’”

“Ah, Helen, I wish you would let me——”

“Let you take compassion on me? Many thanks; but not just yet. Time enough yet, old man.”

“I have waited till I am sick at heart.”

“How many years? Ten? Why, Jacob waited fourteen years for Rachel, as Mr. Birkenshaw told us last Sunday morning; and he proved that Jacob was more than eighty years old when he married her at last. How would you like that, old man?”

And Helen laughed so merrily, that she

nearly drove Randal to despair. He said rather angrily :

“Do be serious for a moment !”

“How can one be serious on such a day as this, with such a sun as this shining upon one’s head ?”

“My dear Helen——”

“Don’t ‘dear’ me ! I am *not* your dear Helen ; and, what is more, I never will be your dear Helen—if you don’t know how to behave better.”

Randal was seriously hurt. Helen saw it at a glance, and in a moment changed her tone. Fond as she was of teasing ; much as she loved mischief and her own way ;—she was at bottom a kind-hearted girl, and did not like to see any one wretched. Moreover, at this stage of her being, she was a genuine coquette : she knew her power over Fred, and used it like a tyrant ; but she did not want him to fly beyond her reach. So she smiled sweetly, and tried to soothe him.

“Ah,” he said, “if you could always speak to me as kindly as now !”

“Why, then, we should make a pretty pair of monotonous owls. Wouldn’t it be a precious life ?”

"Oh, Helen, I love you."

"You silly goose, don't make an ass of yourself!"

"If you only knew how much I love you!"

"There now, that's enough. 'If you only knew' how sheepish you look when you make those silly speeches!—Why, look, Fred, we are stuck in the crowd. How provoking!"

In truth their progress had been arrested. They had come up to the tail of the crowd which was rushing to the river to see the great sight. By the side of the crowd was a clear lane; but it was lined by soldiers, who kept it clear, and prevented any one from stepping into it out of the crowd. Just then a handsome sledge passed them in the lane. Fred was indignant, and ordered Epheem to follow in the wake of the sledge. But no sooner had the horses turned into the open lane, than two soldiers came up and backed them into their former place. Randal's blood began to boil.

"Why should not we go on, as well as those people?" he angrily asked.

"That sledge belongs to his highness Count Golovin," answered one of the soldiers, somewhat roughly: "this lane is for people of rank."

Fred would have struggled with the man, had not Helen diverted his attention by crying:

“What a handsome fellow that officer is!”

The application of the term “handsome” by Helen to any man, was enough to rouse Randal’s curiosity, and—something else. He looked toward the spot to which Helen’s eyes had been drawn, and saw a young officer on horseback, seemingly in command of the soldiers who kept the ground. He certainly had a handsome figure, tall and commanding; but there might have been two opinions about his face. A striking face: thoughtful; full of expression, and full of power. But, at that moment, the owner was employed in keeping back the crowd; and, perhaps, owing to this unpleasant duty, he frowned so fiercely, and looked so stern and forbidding, that few young ladies would have called him handsome. Helen, however, had her head so thoroughly turned by Byron’s heroes, that the very sternness of the officer’s face made him tenfold more heroic in her eyes. And certainly, at that moment, he might have passed for a Lara or a Manfred.

If Randal had looked forward to any unal-

loyed pleasure in Helen's society that day, he was doomed to be disappointed. Helen's remark rankled in his heart. He was naturally jealous, and could not bear to hear her praise any man, least of all a young man. Looking at the officer, he could not help acknowledging inwardly that he was a noble-looking fellow. But all the more was his jealousy aroused. He bit his lip with vexation, and said :

"You don't call him handsome, do you?"

"Yes I do; the finest-looking man I ever saw."

Randal again bit his lip.

"Well, certainly, tastes differ," he said, in an unpleasant tone; "but I should call him plain."

"I have a great mind to ask him to help us out of this crowd," remarked Helen.

A great dread came over poor Randal. What if Helen and that distinguished-looking young officer became acquainted with each other?

"You will do no such thing!" he cried.

"Who will prevent me?"

"I."

"You?" cried Helen, with the utmost scorn.

"Your father placed you under my care."

"Under *your* care! You'll have enough to do to take care of your own foolish pate."

"Helen, if you love me, you will not speak to that man."

"But I don't love you," answered Helen angrily: "I hate you; and, if you go on like this, I shall begin to love that handsome young officer—I shall!"

"Oh, Helen!"

Poor Fred said this in real agony. But Helen was by this time too angry herself to heed his pain. At this moment the officer was passing by; and Helen addressed him and made her request. The officer took off his hat, bowed very low, and looked at Helen. He thought he had never seen such a lovely face before. He was fairly dazzled, and for a while seemed struck dumb. (O the tortures which poor Randal went through during those few moments!) At length a sweet smile came over his stern face.

"Mademoiselle," he said in French, "I shall be delighted to do my best. My orders are to let none but the nobility pass this way: but such beauty as yours would grace the highest courts in Europe."

"May I trespass on your goodness still further, by requesting you to get us a good place?"

"Glad to do my best, mademoiselle."

“A thousand thanks, monsieur.”

Poor Randal's cup of wretchedness seemed full. What could he do? Nothing but bow to his fate. The officer ordered the sledge to move on, and rode by its side, talking politely to Helen all the time.

“You are English, I presume, mademoiselle?” he said.

“Yes, monsieur: at least, Scotch.”

“Ah, I thought so: such beauty is bred nowhere but in the great Anglo-Saxon stock. Will mademoiselle allow me to ask the name of the gentleman who is so happy as to possess such a daughter?”

“My father is M. Cameron of Pea Street.”

The officer took a card out of his breast-coat pocket, and (taking off his hat) presented it to Helen, who read the words: “Captain Ma-
leenovsky, Life Guards.”

“What a beautiful name!” she thought.

Poor Frederick Randal!

“I shall do myself the honour of waiting on you at your father's house,” said Captain Ma-
leenovsky, “and ripening the acquaintance thus happily begun. That is to say, if mademoiselle has no objection?”

“None whatever, monsieur: I shall be de-

lighted to see you ; and my father will have the opportunity of thanking you for your kindness and courtesy."

"Pray don't speak of thanks, mademoiselle."

They had now reached the Neva ; and Captain Maleenovsky placed Helen in a capital spot for seeing all that was to be seen. Then, to Randal's great relief, he retired to look after his duties ; but, alas, to Randal's dismay, he soon returned, and began to point out to Helen distinguished men and women in the crowd.

At this moment Helen noticed a gorgeously apparelled gentleman staring at her. Well, I daresay he, like many others, was dazzled by her beauty. But there were few who would have winked at her so unblushingly. She asked Captain Maleenovsky who he was. Fred, who did not relish the intimacy which seemed to be springing up between the young officer and Helen, begged the latter to hold her tongue. Captain Maleenovsky looked at Fred for a moment in a way which made the Englishman's blood boil, and quietly answered that it was the great Prince Boriatinsky.

CHAPTER III.

TO GO, OR NOT TO GO.

“I prefer the golden mean
Pomp and penury between :
For alarm and peril wait
Ever on the loftiest state ;
And the lowest to the end
Obloquy and scorn attend.”

COWPER : *Poems.*

FROM what you have as yet seen of Helen, you may think she is not worth further notice. A mere beauty ; a shallow, heartless coquette ! Well, even if this were my estimate of my heroine, I should not throw her away as worthless. I think that the lowest form of human life is worth studying ; that, if we are wise ourselves, we may gather wisdom even from a shallow, heartless coquette. Still, if this had been my estimate of Helen Cameron, I should not have chosen her for my heroine. I believe that behind that outer crust of coquettishness there was hidden a true womanly nature which might yet come out. My faith in the ennobling discipline of life is so strong, that I do not despair of being able to say in time : “Look on this picture and on that !” I have seen a grub

change into a chrysalis, and that into a butterfly: so I have foolishly mourned over many a girl who has seemed to me light and frivolous, till the years have rolled by, and the sanctities of love and wifehood and motherhood have turned her into a right glorious woman. Have patience, then, with Helen Cameron.

Moreover, I believe there are few girls, placed as Helen was, who would not have fallen into the same mistakes. She had no mother to train her; no brothers and sisters to draw her out of herself, and teach her the rights and claims of others. She was beautiful beyond the common, and had early become "the observed of all observers." Wherever she went, there were plenty of young men to flatter her, and make her believe that she was a goddess on earth, to whom every one must bow. Her father and Miss Meldrum, by letting her have her own way in nearly everything, had strengthened this belief; or, rather, had laid the foundation, on which said foolish young men had only reared the superstructure. In spite of the intellectual training she had received, and the many accomplishments she could boast of, she was still, in the highest sense, a wild animal; an untamed child of

nature that had yet to be brought under the yoke. Above all, among the crowds of her admirers, she had not found one to whom she could surrender her heart. She knew nothing of love. She had heard of it, and read of it; but it was as a man born blind might hear of some beautiful scene. Young men had spoken to her of it; but their words had found no echo in her breast.

Was there going to be a change? Was a new experience about to be added to the story of her life? Was life about to begin its real discipline on Helen Cameron? She had seen a man who had struck her as no other man had ever done. Captain Maleenovsky had taken her imagination captive: was he going to touch the right chord in her heart? This was the crisis of her life: the meeting of the ways; the turning-point whence her history must take an upward or a downward course. And, when I look at this, it saddens me to think of those who never have the chance. What becomes of those girls who never meet a man that they can love? And what of those who, meeting one, have not the chance of acting on the promptings of the heart? In this respect women are worse off than men. They can't

say to any man they love: "I love you." They must wait for the man to make the first move; and, if that never come, they must be dumb, and try to crush their feelings as best they may. Not that the rule is strictly enforced; for I know more than two or three young ladies who practise a little bit of love-making on the sly. It is as well, perhaps, that society should put its veto on the practice; for if it were understood that the offer might come from either sex—— I draw a veil over the picture! But, as I say this, I can't help placing myself on the stand-point of the gentler sex. If the lion were to paint the man? Ah, I pity some ladies!

I hope I have not led you to think that Helen Cameron made love to Captain Maleenovsky. If she had *felt* the love, I am not sure that she would not have blurted it out. She was very impulsive; in fact, hitherto had acted chiefly from impulse. She was in the habit of saying what was uppermost in her mind. Her heart lay very near her mouth, and left the brain in the rear. But, the fact is, as yet her imagination had been touched much more than her heart. As she went home from the Feast of the Jordan, she kept thinking of Captain

Maleenovsky. Poor Frederick Randal had to put up with the dregs of her regards. Mr. Cameron was away from home the whole of that day; looking after that ten thousand pounds business. But Miss Meldrum's ears were filled with the praises of the "handsome young officer." All that evening she could think of little else. As she lay in bed at night, the dazzling picture was before her eyes; and, when she fell asleep, she dreamt of Captain Maleenovsky!

When she went down the following morning, she found her father and Miss Meldrum in the breakfast-room. Mr. Cameron was in high spirits, and embraced her warmly. Whether he had gained the ten thousand pounds, or what was the cause of his flow of spirits, Helen could not say. Miss Meldrum took her seat at the tray. She would not have resigned her post for a good deal. Luckily, Helen did not covet it; but, if it had come to a struggle between the two, Miss Meldrum would have had to give way. A pile of letters lay on the table near the spot where Mr. Cameron usually sat; and that gentleman was soon absorbed in the double task of taking in the contents of his plate and those

of his letters. Helen was so brimful of the thoughts which the foregoing day had awakened, and so anxious to let her fellow-creatures have the benefit of them, that she did not relish her father's absorption in his twofold task. No fun in talking to Miss Meldrum; for Miss Meldrum had heard the whole repeated *ad nauseam*, and must have already got whatever good it could do her. Helen could keep her patience no longer, and burst out.

"Papa," she said, "you have not asked me yet how I liked the Feast of the Jordan."

"Eh, puss?"

This was all that Mr. Cameron deigned to say. He did not even look up from his letters; but entrenched behind them, as behind some strong fortification, he let off his random shot.

"No, sir," cried Helen, "I shall not be friendly with you till you look up from those hateful letters."

When she was angry with her father, or made-believe to be angry, she always called him "sir."

"What's up?" asked Mr. Cameron, still reading.

“You are not Cæsar, sir,” answered Helen : “you can’t do three things at once. You can’t say : *Veni, vidi, vici.*”

I rather think Helen, with all her accomplishments (Latin was not one of them), had a vague notion that *veni, vidi, vici*, were the Latin names of the three or four things which Cæsar is said to have done at the same time. Mr. Cameron at length looked up from his letters, and said :

“Well, Helen, what do you want with me?”

“Don’t you want to know how I got on?”

“Well, child, and how *did* you get on?”

“You don’t deserve to know!” answered Helen pettishly: “you were a naughty and unfeeling papa; and I hope you did not get the ten thousand pounds after all.”

“That is something—like cutting off—your nose to spite—your face,” said Miss Meldrum, with a gleam of humour in her black eyes.

“Ay, child,” retorted Mr. Cameron, “I can say with the father in the parable: ‘Daughter, thou art ever with me; and all that I have is thine.’ For whom do I toil and slave from morning till night but for you?”

There was a touch of tenderness in his

voice and a pathos in his manner which Helen could not withstand. She gave him a kiss which would have thrown Frederick Randal into convulsions of envy. A wild, impulsive girl !

“Forgive me, darling papa !” she cried ; “I didn’t mean to hurt you. You dear, darling papa !”

“You aggravating puss !” said Mr. Cameron, returning her caress with interest : “I have a great mind to cut you off with a shilling, and leave my property to found an institution for the education of wild cats.”

“Do, papa ! I like that : that *would* be an original idea ; and you must make me lady-superintendent for life, you know.”

“Lady-superintendent ! One of the very first wild cats I’d have caught and tamed there !”

“And did you get your ten thousand pounds, papa, after all ?”

“Go back to your seat, you puss, and leave me to eat my breakfast in peace.”

“But not to read your letters,” answered Helen archly.

“Well, and how *did* you get on yesterday ?”

This set Helen off. After giving a rattling

description of the events of the day, she added enthusiastically :

“ And, oh, papa, there was such a splendid young officer, such a handsome fellow, who was so kind to me. He took me to one of the very best spots. And, do you know, he said he would call upon me to ripen the acquaintance ; and I told him you would be delighted to see him, and to thank him for all his kindness to me.”

Mr. Cameron's brow clouded over. The possibility of Helen's marrying a Russian was never very pleasant to him. But then, by living in Russia, he was always running that risk : he had counted the cost ; and it was not that which troubled him now. The fact was, he knew more of young officers than Helen did : and he had no high opinion of their character ; thought them a low, drunken, frivolous set of men. The thought of a young Russian officer becoming free of the house, entering into friendly relations with his daughter, was anything but agreeable to him.

“ What is his name ?” he gravely asked.

“ Captain Maleenovsky, of the Life Guards”

“ Captain Maleenovsky ! I never heard his name before. I shall make inquiries about

him ; and, in the meanwhile, I wish you not to see him at all."

" But if he should call while you are out ? "

" Refuse to see him."

" Oh, papa, that *would* be ungracious ! "

" Well, then, see him with Miss Meldrum ; but be sure and keep him at a distance."

" Very well, papa."

While Mr. Cameron was yet speaking, Natalia, the chief parlour-maid—a tidy, good-looking girl—had entered the room with a packet in her hand, and handed it to her master, saying :

" From her highness, Princess Donskaya."

Mr. Cameron opened the packet, and took out a card, gilt and illuminated at the edges.

" An invitation to Mr. and Miss Cameron to attend her highness's ball on the 10th," he said.

And he handed the card to Helen. Helen clapped her hands with childish delight. She was naturally gay and sociable : her highest triumphs were won in public assemblies ; and the idea of a ball at a real, live princess's was irresistible.

" That will be charming," she cried.

" Lay your eggs before you hatch them," said Mr. Cameron, with a meaning smile.

“But you’ll go, of course, papa, and take me!”

“Why of course? I am not sure that it is right to go to balls.”

“Mr. Herbert thinks that—there is no harm in going,” said Miss Meldrum, adding a significant toss of the head to each of the usual jerks.

The Rev. Reginald Herbert was chaplain to the English Embassy. Miss Meldrum was a Churchwoman; whereas Mr. Cameron, as a Presbyterian, had thrown in his lot among the Congregationalists. Miss Meldrum’s toss of the head was a broad hint that there was greater breadth among Church-people than among Dissenters. She was no bigot; indeed, usually worshipped with Mr. Cameron. Still she liked to have her quiet fling at Dissenters; and Mr. Cameron could return the blow with interest.

“I do not pin my faith to any priest’s sleeve,” he retorted: “I leave that to Churchmen, and especially to Churchwomen.”

“We know how to think—for ourselves too.”

“Yet you must needs bring in Mr. Herbert’s authority at every point,” answered Mr. Cameron good-humouredly. “He is a

nice young man ; still, none but a spinster could build him up into a law."

"I am sure he is—a greater scholar—and a greater gentleman—than Mr. Birkenshaw."

"And a great deal handsomer," said Mr. Cameron laughing, "and altogether more interesting to look at."

"You don't mean—to insinuate——"

"No, I don't."

"But, papa, you took me to the ball at the English Embassy the other day," said Helen.

"Yes, my darling ; and I could not help thinking then how much better my time might have been spent."

"Oh, papa ! I thought you enjoyed it so much."

"But a ball at the Embassy is one thing, and a ball at Princess Donskaya's is another."

"But who is this—Princess Donskaya ?" asked Miss Meldrum.

"A beautiful coquette, who is turning the heads of half the young noblemen in Petersburg."

"But, papa dear, you yourself say that we ought not to believe all the scandal afloat."

"Still I would not throw myself in the way of people who have scandal attached to their

names. Besides, I can't think why this Princess should invite me. I know nothing of her personally."

"Perhaps she knows some of our friends."

"Her circle is said to be exclusively aristocratic; and what could have induced her to invite a merchant and his daughter?"

"Do go, dear papa!" cried Helen in her coaxing tone.

"Ay, do, Mr. Cameron!" echoed Miss Meldrum. "It is no question—of ten thousand pounds."

The gleam of humour in her black eyes seemed to say: "It is only a question of right or wrong; and surely that is not worth ten thousand pounds!"

"If you love me, you'll go, papa," said Helen.

"Surely, my darling, you don't require such a test of my love," said Mr. Cameron smiling.

"Yes, but I do, papa," answered Helen, returning his look with an arch one of her own: "ever since yesterday I am in horrible doubts about it; and I believe that you don't love me at all, you naughty papa. Do you now?"

“No, puss, I don’t.”

“You owe me some reparation for breaking your promise yesterday,” continued Helen: “take me to the ball; and I’ll forgive you.”

She ended by going up to him, and throwing her arms round his neck. Miss Meldrum looked at the two with amusement plainly written on her face. She believed that Mr. Cameron would yield. But she was mistaken for once. On a point touching Helen’s highest welfare he could be firmer than on most other things; and all that Helen’s coaxing and wheedling could wring out of him was a promise that he would think the matter over.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN MALEENOVSKY.

“One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.”

SHAKSPERE.

Soon after breakfast, Mr. Cameron went away ; and, when the breakfast-things had been removed, Miss Meldrum and Helen sat down to their studies. But Helen could not fix her thoughts on what she read. She kept thinking of all she had seen the day before. Though Captain Maleenovsky had touched only her imagination, it did not follow that she was out of danger. There was some danger of his monopolising her thoughts at least. That handsome figure, in the brilliant uniform, kept dancing before her eyes in such absurd fashion, that it hid the letters on which they ought to have been fixed. It was quite a new thing in Helen's experience. As a rule, she was a diligent student. A gay coquette, a diligent student : there's a contradiction for you ! But, then, Helen was, as yet, a mass of contradictions ; and *would be*, till some one master-passion began to sway her soul.

It seemed a relief to her when Frederick Randal came in. Not that Fred was just then in harmony with the current of her thoughts ; but he released her from the irksome task of fixing those thoughts on something still more foreign to her mood. Fred was not in the best of tempers, and did nothing to raise himself in Helen's eyes. The Feast of the Jordan had not passed off pleasantly for him. He was still sore about the dashing young officer, who had come in between him and Helen, and neatly bowled him out. A painful impression had for some time been forcing itself upon him : that Helen Cameron, with all her loveliness, was a heartless coquette. That thought had been driven deeper the day before. He had been wronged : Helen had no right to be so kind and gracious to a stranger. His own long devotion to her had deserved a better return. Who was Helen Cameron, that she should flout him as she did ? There were plenty of other girls in the world, who would be glad enough to have him. Was there not sweet Jenny Cameron, Helen's own cousin, who, if he could believe his sister, was ready to drop into his mouth, without giving him the trouble of plucking her ?

Fred had come, big with a brave resolve to trot out his wrongs before Helen, and have them righted at last. He would seek an explanation: she should shilly-shally no longer. But scarcely had he begun to speak, when Natalia came in, with a card in her hand. There was a flutter in Helen's heart, as she glanced at the card; and she could not hinder a gleam of joy from lighting up her face. She never could hide her feelings, poor girl! Fred was watching her keenly, jealously. A gentleman's card!

"His coming seems to give you great pleasure, whoever it is," he said, somewhat bitterly: "who is it?"

"It is only Captain Maleenovsky, who was so polite to us yesterday," answered Helen, trying, in vain, to appear cool and unconcerned.

Poor Randal was at his wits' end. He had been most anxious to have his explanation with Helen before she could see Captain Maleenovsky again. What was he to do? Well, he did about the most foolish thing which he could have done.

"Helen, you will not see him!" he said.

"I will, though," said Helen haughtily; "I

will not have my movements controlled by you."

"I do not wish to control you," cried Fred meekly ; "but Helen, if you love me——"

"Now don't be silly again, Fred !"

"You are cruel, Helen !"

Randal had looked uncommonly big when he came in ; but he had now dwindled down to his usual size. The high and mighty tone with which he had started had collapsed. Natalia was still in the room, watching the scene. She had picked up a few English words in Mr. Cameron's house ; and she was mightily amused at the part played by Randal, who was no great favourite with any of the servants. Helen saw the smile on her face, and, guessing its meaning, rather tartly ordered her :

"Show Captain Maleenovsky up."

When Captain Maleenovsky appeared, he presented a remarkable contrast to Frederick Randal. Helen had marked the contrast the day before. Then it had been scarcely fair to compare the two. The captain had been "master of the situation," commanding the troops. But, now that they appeared on equal terms, Helen was almost painfully struck with the thought that Fred looked small in every

way by Captain Maleenovsky's side. There was a look of massive strength, a calmness of bearing arising out of that strength, and withal a polished and even courtly manner, which would have made the guardsman conspicuous anywhere. After greeting him with studied politeness, Helen introduced him to Miss Meldrum as her governess.

"Ah, mademoiselle, I envy you your task," said Maleenovsky in French, making a stately bow.

"I do not think—you would have envied me—a few years ago," answered Miss Meldrum.

"It is, doubtless, to your painful efforts that we are in a measure indebted for what we see to-day. I congratulate you on the result, mademoiselle. For my part, I think I should have enjoyed the process as well as the result."

"Monsieur is too flattering."

"By no means, mademoiselle. I am giving feeble and inadequate utterance to the simple truth."

"Even truth is to be spoken with reserve."

Helen then introduced the captain to Randal. Maleenovsky made another courtly bow, and said:

"I had the honour of seeing monsieur yesterday."

"Yes, I saw you," answered Fred disdainfully.

There was a pause. Randal's manner threw a chill over the company; and there was some danger of the conversation collapsing. But Miss Meldrum gallantly came to the rescue:

"We are very much—obliged to you, monsieur—for your attentions—to Mademoiselle Cameron yesterday."

"Not worth mentioning. I did what common courtesy requires from a gentleman to a lady."

"I rather suspect that—you went beyond that. Mademoiselle came home—full of your praises."

"I should have earned the execration of all judges of beauty if I had deserted the loveliest lady in Petersburg. I am proud to think that I have earned the gratitude of all the nobility by presenting to them the sight which they saw yesterday."

What was poor Fred thinking all this time? As for Miss Meldrum, she was not over well pleased. To her truthful nature there seemed

to be a hollowness about these sounding flatteries. And yet, in spite of them, she liked the look of Captain Maleenovsky. There was an honesty and a manliness about him out of keeping with these stilted speeches. Somehow she thought that it was not his real nature which was speaking; but a false outgrowth, the offshoot of an artificial training, which had overtopped and hid the true man. She instinctively felt that the man was truer than his speech. Helen was disappointed; deeply, bitterly disappointed. Was this the hero of her imagination? Had she mistaken a stuffed figure of a man for a hero? Were these empty commonplaces the best he could utter? Why, a dash of wickedness would have been welcome as a change! A Lara, indeed! Was it not a Sir Charles Grandison?

It was somewhat strange that Fred should unwittingly be the means of revealing to each other the true natures of two human beings whom he was doing his best to keep asunder. Anxious to put a stop to further compliments, which were distasteful to him as coming from Captain Maleenovsky, though he saw no harm in them when they came from his own sweet self, he asked the guardsman :

“Do you know what has become of the fellow that was hurt yesterday?”

In returning from the Feast the day before, Fred’s spirited English horses, excited by the dense crowd and the loud cries, had become unmanageable; and one of them, rearing, had cut a poor boy’s head open with his hoof.

“Poor child!” answered Captain Maleenovsky, with deep feeling. “It is doubtful whether he will live.”

His whole manner had changed in a moment, as if by magic. It seemed as if another man were talking. The overstrained courtesy had disappeared; and the real man spoke out at last. The tenderness in his tone, and the earnestness in his manner, went straight to Helen’s heart. Ah, that strong, calm, self-possessed gentleman was a MAN after all!

“I never knew my horses behave so badly before,” said Fred.

This speech jarred on the ears of all who heard it. It was so out of tune with what had gone before. No regret for the accident! No pity for the sufferer! No sympathy with his friends!

“But have you not been to see him?” asked Maleenovsky, with a look of surprise.

“No, monsieur. But I gave the father my address yesterday. I promised to make compensation for any loss he may sustain; and I daresay the solid tin will please him better than my going to see his brat.”

I daresay ninety-nine out of a hundred officers would have taken this view of the matter; but Maleenovsky was cast in another mould. Helen felt, to the core of her being, how far he was above most of the Russian gentlemen whom she had ever met. That sternness, which she had marked the day before, now settled on his granite face; and he looked a different man from the bland, courtly, flattery-weaving gentleman who had entered the room. Fred had unwittingly brought out the true man in him. He spoke with an energy which thrilled Helen through and through, and made even Randal wince.

“No, monsieur,” he said indignantly: “you are mistaken there. The Russian working-man has his feelings as well as other men. Indeed, I have seen more feeling there than in some English gentlemen. If you had seen the father distracted, and the mother nearly weeping her eyes out, over the poor little moaning, groaning sufferer, you would never have thought

any amount of dirty bank-notes would plaster over that wound. One touch of human sympathy would do them more good than all the gold in the Bank of England."

Captain Maleenovsky spoke in a tone of authority. Miss Meldrum felt he was crushing Fred.

"I am sorry it should have happened," said Randal.

"I would earnestly advise you, monsieur, for your own sake, to go and see them."

"Have you been to see them?" asked Helen.

"Yes, I have been there the whole morning, trying to soothe the heart-broken parents. But it is a hopeless task; the poor, mangled boy is their only child."

"Will you take me there, monsieur?" asked Helen, with trembling voice and tears in her eyes.

"With the greatest pleasure," answered Captain Maleenovsky, his grand, massive face lighted up with joy, and something higher than joy: "my sledge is waiting below; and I do believe that the sight of your face, and the sound of your voice, would do them more good than anything else."

"I will go with you, then. I feel that I am as much answerable for the accident as M. Randal."

"What do you mean?" said Fred. "How could I help my horses rearing?"

Helen had been strangely softened within the last few minutes. Instead of firing up, as she would have done at another time, and answering Fred roughly, she meekly said:

"I didn't want to hurt you, Fred; but you and I were the occasion of the accident, you know."

At this moment Miss Meldrum stepped in with a caution, in English:

"Helen, darling, are you—not forgetting what—your papa said—this morning?"

"He never could have meant it to apply to a case like this," answered Helen promptly: "he is too good himself to object to an errand of mercy."

Maleenovsky knew something of English; but he had not the slightest idea that Miss Meldrum referred to himself. I suppose Fred guessed it.

"Have you any objection to my accompanying you?" he said to Captain Maleenovsky.

"I should have been most happy," answered the guardsman politely; "but my sledge has room only for two."

"Tit for tat," thought Miss Meldrum.

Indeed, she was not a little pleased. Before, it was Fred's sledge that "had room only for two!"

"This sight has saddened me so much," said Captain Maleenovsky, "that I feel quite unstrung. I have faith in the Great Power that governs the world," he added after a short pause, in a tone of deep reverence; "but I cannot understand (indeed, it is a dreadful mystery to me!) how he can allow such agonies to alight on poor, helpless, innocent children. I have been puzzling over it all the morning."

"He sends it for their good," suggested Miss Meldrum.

"I am surprised that a captain in the army should take such a sentimental view of things," remarked Fred, with an unmistakable sneer.

Helen expected to see Captain Maleenovsky fire up as he had done before. Had not a slur been cast on his soldierly character? But she was disappointed. He could fire up in the defence of others; but, where his own charac-

ter was concerned, he could be as cool as a judge. His calmness and courtesy, in answering Randal, contrasted strongly with the stern and even fierce energy which had carried him away a few moments before.

“I do not call it sentimental,” he said, quite gently. “I have had to flog my soldiers; and, as the lash fell, not a nerve has quivered, because I have felt that they deserved it.”

There was a sternness and massive strength about the man which made the statement credible.

“But if it be for the children’s good?” suggested Miss Meldrum.

“If I had a boy, and thought it would save his life, I believe I could cut off his leg with my own hand, and not feel that tremble,” continued Maleenovsky.

Again his face and bearing supplied the commentary to his statement.

“I believe you, monsieur,” said Miss Meldrum.

“But I do not see how it *can* be for their good. Look at the poor boy who was hurt yesterday: in what way will his fearful agonies do him any good? God help him, poor

boy! I can quite understand a grown-up man being bettered by suffering, through reflection. But this child is too young to understand it."

As Miss Meldrum's answer was very much obscured by her dashes, I will give it without them.

"We are all short-sighted," she said, "and often cannot understand in what way the suffering works on us for our good; but we may be quite sure that the loving Father would not send it save in love. And, as to your special argument, monsieur, it would hold good if children were always to remain children: but remember that boys grow up into men; and the discipline of life, of which suffering is a part, cannot begin too early."

"There is something in what you say, mademoiselle," answered Captain Maleenovsky thoughtfully; "and, though I cannot accept it as a full explanation of the awful mystery, I must reflect on it at leisure, and see what I can make of it."

While Helen went to her own room to put on her dress, Miss Meldrum thought of all she had seen and heard of Captain Maleenovsky that morning. She had been quietly taking

stock of him all along. Well, she was unmistakably drawn toward him. A strong, sturdy, manly nature; so unexpectedly revealing depths of tenderness and feeling within! O if he were only not a Russian!

When Helen returned, Captain Maleenovsky politely handed her down to the sledge. As they drove along, she could not help thinking how strange it was that, of her own will, she should be driving alone with this man, whom she had never seen till the day before, and that she should feel so much at home with him. And did not their common errand of mercy draw them still closer together? And, during that short hour, did they not reveal more of themselves to each other than they could have done in many an ordinary day?

CHAPTER V.

THE BALL.

“*Romeo.* What lady is that who doth enrich the hand
Of yonder knight?

Servant. I know not, sir.

Romeo. O she doth teach the torches to burn bright:
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop’s ear;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear!”

SHAKSPERE: *Romeo and Juliet.*

THOSE who have read of Anna Princess Don-skaya elsewhere will not wish me to describe her again; and, to those who have not, Mr. Cameron’s few words will convey a sufficiently correct idea of the comet which dazzled the fashionable world of St. Petersburg for a time. The “handsome” and “fascinating” coquette was now at the height of the triumph which she had achieved at one bound. There are men still living who will speak “with bated breath” of the “sensation” she made. Grave philosophers might laugh at the *furore* she excited; but it had its serious side, and had no small influence on the manners and morals of the fashionable world for a long time.

Anna had, of course, her reasons for invit-

ing Mr. Cameron and his daughter to the ball. It was quite true that "her circle was exclusively aristocratic." In ordinary circumstances she would no more have thought of inviting Mr. and Miss Cameron, than she would have thought of dining with her washerwoman or her cook. But she could not have her own way in everything. She was but a young beginner in the race of fashion; and she had a hard battle to fight to hold her own with such rivals as Princess Dashkova and Count Golovin's wife. "Principle," such as it was, had to give way to "expediency." She had to learn the truth enshrined in the words: "She stoops to conquer." And, proud and scornful as she was, there was no one who could do it with a better grace when she had a motive strong enough to sway her.

The motive power in the present case was—Prince Boriatinsky. He had been struck with Helen Cameron at the Feast of the Jordan; and, as he longed to make her acquaintance, he begged his "dear friend" Anna to bring the beauty to the ball. Now Prince Boriatinsky was the "male arbiter of fashion" at St. Petersburg. It was the highest triumph which Anna had yet achieved, to lure the

prince away from Princess Dashkova, and enrol him as a member of her own *corps de ballet*. He was (fashionably speaking) by far the greatest man on her establishment. Count Baranovitch was one of her chief admirers, and attended her balls; but, though the count was Prime Minister of Russia, and held in his hand the life and freedom of every one of the dancers, he was Nobody in the fashionable world. Suppose the prince took it into his head to be affronted, and to carry his "male arbitership of fashion" back to the rival shop of Princess Dashkova? Anna might as well shut up shop at once. She could not afford to disregard a wish of the great Prince Boriatinsky.

The offspring of her resolve to please the prince was—the presence of Mr. Cameron and Helen at the ball. Mr. Cameron had made up his mind to gratify Helen for once. He expressly said "for once:" she must not take it for granted that she was to repeat the visit. He would go, and see that there was no harm. The next two days were very busy ones for Miss Meldrum and Helen; and Fred, who called three or four times, was told that he could not see either of them till after the ball. New dresses had to be made; because, at a

princess's ball, she could not wear anything that had graced a ball-room before. Mr. Cameron bought a new set of jewels, and presented them to his daughter; and, on the eventful night, he drove her to the Princess Donskaya's, and brought her into the ball-room amidst a buzz of wonder and delight. Who was this new beauty that had suddenly burst upon the fashionable world?

Helen, on entering, had a confused sense of dazzling light: light so dazzling that, at first, she could see nothing clearly; but, her eyes becoming accustomed to it by degrees, she could distinguish individual objects. It was the most brilliant sight she had ever seen. The splendour of the hall itself, the gorgeousness of the light, the richness of the dresses worn, the blaze of gold and jewellery which glittered on all sides, the beauty of the ladies set off by the manly bearing of the men, made an impression on her which she did not soon forget. She had had no idea before that there were so many beautiful women, or so many gallant men, in Russia. It was on this brilliant company that she suddenly burst like a shooting-star; and I must say that, in the whole of that assembly, there was not a

be selfish to ask for more ; because I am sure that all the gentlemen present will be longing to have you for a partner."

"With great pleasure, monsieur."

All this was somewhat disappointing to Helen. Captain Maleenovsky showed himself at his worst when in his complimentary mood. I suppose the air of the place had something to do with it. Helen did not want his flattery. She was tired of all that. There was a better side in her nature which craved more solid nourishment ; and she had had a glimpse into the better side of *his* nature, which made flattery from him more distasteful than from the crowds of idlers that buzzed around her.

Captain Maleenovsky conducted his partner to the upper end of the room, and presented her to the mistress of the house. A bob on one side, and a bob on the other ; and the work of introduction was done, and two human beings were supposed thenceforth to know each other for life. In outward seeming, Anna received Helen graciously ; but, for all that, she felt a sharp and sudden pang within. She had no doubt that Helen would in time aspire to become the leader of fashion ;

and it seemed a cruel destiny which forced her to usher into the fashionable world one who might eclipse herself.

Here Prince Boriatinsky bustled forward. He was the most richly-dressed man in the room; not the best dressed, perhaps, but certainly the most gorgeously appparelled. A handsome man, too, to look at: good features; a dazzling complexion; luxuriant hair, which fell almost to his shoulders in womanly curls; and brilliant white teeth, which he was fond of showing, he smiled so often. His mouth was somewhat too large and sensual; but his admirers called it "voluptuous." But the worst thing about his face was the eye. How shall I paint it? Well, not a nice eye, by any means; rather fishy and blear. He knew it himself, because he made up for opening his mouth by closing his eyes.

"Will your Highness do me the favour of presenting me to Mademoiselle Cameron?" he said to Princess Donskaya.

"With great pleasure," answered Anna; meaning, "With great pain."

A bob on one side, and a bow on the other; and another pair of human souls became known to each other.

“Miss Cameron, will you confer on me the lofty felicity of conducting the most magnificent beauty in St. Petersburg to the second dance?” said Prince Boriatinsky in English.

“Willingly, your Highness.”

“I should have done myself the honour of inviting you for the introductory saltatory maze,” continued the prince; “but my hand is appropriated for that by her highness, Princess Donskaya.”

Highness, always somewhat grandiloquent, thought that big words would fill his hearer with awe.

Here the gentlemen began to crowd round Helen, and to beg for an introduction. It was lucky for Captain Maleenovsky that he had already nailed her for two of the “saltatory mazes;” for otherwise he would have had no chance of dancing with her at all.

During the first dance he kept showing the worse side of his nature. Whether the air of the place still tainted him, or whether the compliments which had been heaped upon her by the prince made him think that he must outbid him by still larger doses of flattery, he wearied Helen with praises of herself. She could not understand him at

all: he seemed so much worse than himself. To get rid of the subject, she asked:

“Who is this Prince Boriatinsky?”

“Don’t you know, mademoiselle? I thought every one knew the great Prince Boriatinsky.”

His tone was very sarcastic; but Helen did not notice it.

“I heard his name for the first time at the Feast of the Jordan,” she answered very simply.

“You astonish me, mademoiselle. Why, his highness is in one sense the greatest man in Petersburg.”

“In what sense?”

“Ask any here, and they would say, ‘in the highest sense’; in the fashionable sense. He is the great ‘arbiter of fashion.’ Could man’s ambition higher go? At least, his highness’s does not go much higher, I think. Ah, he is a happy man! While we ordinary mortals are toiling painfully along the road, he has reached the goal.”

“Is he rich?”

“One of the richest noblemen in Russia.”

“Is he a married man?”

Captain Maleenovsky looked at Helen’s face: what was her motive for asking the

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Captain Maleenovsky looked at Helen’s face: what was her motive for asking the

question? Could that fresh young girl have a touch of "ambition" too? Princess Boriatinska! Well, it sounded rather grand.

"No," he answered: "I think he never will marry."

"Why not?"

"For one thing, he is getting too old."

"Why, he does not look more than thirty."

"True; but I fancy he is older."

And Captain Malcenovsky smiled.

The first dance was over; and the subject of their conversation came up to claim Helen's hand. Oh, the mighty condescending way in which he did it!

"It is impossible to express how transported I am to have this opportunity of making your acquaintance, Miss Cameron," said Prince Boriatinsky: "ever since your transcendent beauty burst upon my vision at the Feast of the Jordan, I have longed and sighed for this moment."

"Your Highness is too good," answered Helen.

"Nay, my dear Miss Cameron, I am expressing myself with as much moderation as the circumstances will permit. It is impossible for human language, even for your

own magnificent language, glorified as it has been by the contributions of a Shakspeare and a Milton, to describe the sensation which your superhuman attractions have produced upon me. I feel like one intoxicated with beauty ; and if I appear to be extravagant in my exclamations of delight, you must attribute it to the extraordinary splendour of your own personal appearance."

"I know your Highness is only flattering me."

Still it was enough to turn a young girl's head ; and Helen did not wholly escape the danger. She was but a grub as yet ; and she felt it as a triumph to be spoken of in such terms by "the arbiter of fashion," and one of the mightiest princes of Russia. Worth noticing that the flattery, which seemed so distasteful in the mouth of a Captain Malecnovsky, should have given any pleasure when coming from the lips of a Prince Boriatinsky.

"I am not at all flattering you, my dear Miss Cameron," said the prince. "I appeal to the testimony of a witness who can never prevaricate or deceive—the mirror which reflects your beautiful visage : and, if you will not credit the evidence it supplies, I appeal

still further to the sensation which you made just now as you entered the hall ; and if you are still incredulous, I will publicly ask the noblemen and gentlemen present what is their opinion of your extraordinary beauty."

Helen was somewhat alarmed lest he should carry out his threat, and said that she must yield to his higher judgment. Highness became more high-flown than ever ; and Helen had as much as she could safely hold of the incense which she had hitherto loved only too well.

When Captain Maleenovsky came to claim her for the Mazurka, his compliments sounded tame after those of the prince. After some skirmishes he was pulled short by Helen, who said seriously :

"I wish you would pay me no more compliments, monsieur. Nature never meant you to succeed in that line : Prince Boriatinsky is a far greater artist than you ; and it is quite useless to try to rival him."

Captain Maleenovsky was ill at ease. There was no denying it : he was beginning to feel deeply interested in Helen Cameron. Ah, what chance had he against the high and mighty Prince Boriatinsky ? Had he not better give up the struggle at once ?

“So his highness has been paying you compliments!” he exclaimed. “No wonder mine look poor after his; because mine are kept within the bounds of truth. You are right, mademoiselle: nature never meant me to succeed in that line.”

What was it that thrilled Captain Maleenovsky through and through? These were the simple words, but uttered more slowly and emphatically than Helen generally spoke:

“Nature meant you for higher things.”

How much hangs on seeming trifles! Perhaps these simple words settled the captain’s fate. He felt a choking sensation in his throat. It was as much as he could do to speak at all; but he did, and earnestly too.

“Mademoiselle,” he said, “you shall never hear another compliment from me as long as you live!”

“How is the poor boy that was hurt so much the other day?” asked Helen.

“Ah, poor fellow, he is gone!”

The captain’s whole tone and manner had suddenly changed, as on the day when he visited Helen.

“Gone!” exclaimed Helen.

“Yes, dead! The poor parents are utterly

distracted. I wish you would visit them again, mademoiselle ! You have no idea how much good you did the other day. Don't think I am paying you a compliment," added Captain Maleenovsky, smiling.

"I will go," answered Helen.

Captain Maleenovsky was himself again. Ah, if he had but known how much greater he seemed in his present mood, he might well have thanked Helen for the rebuke which led him to resolve never to flatter her again.

"Will you allow me to drive you there to-morrow morning, mademoiselle ?" he said, after a short pause.

"Yes, monsieur, if my father does not object."

"Ah, it was the wise man who said it was better to go into the house of mourning than into the house of feasting. How strange the very name of death sounds in this place ! How out of keeping with all the surroundings ! And yet, mademoiselle, while we are gaily dancing away, hundreds of men and women are dying in all parts of the world."

The thought itself was "out of keeping with all the surroundings : " and Helen Cameron was as yet "out of keeping with the followings ;"

too young, too gay, and too thoughtless, to enter fully into its meaning. Still she preferred it to the empty compliments which had gone before.

Nothing more of any importance to our history took place at the ball. Helen's *début* in the fashionable world was a triumph from beginning to end. Prince Boriatinsky had danced with her four times in the course of the night ! Such luck had never been known to fall to the lot of a *débutante* before : no, not even when Anna Princess Donskaya first appeared on the St. Petersburg stage. Helen Cameron could henceforth go forth to the world most emphatically stamped with the *imprimatur* of the great Prince Boriatinsky.

CHAPTER VI.

PRINCE BORIATINSKY.

“A gown of silk ye sall na lack.”

Jock o' Hazeldean.

THE great Prince Boriatinsky had his enemies. What great man has not? And what will not the malice of enemies lead them to say? There is no slander so foul that they will not coin, and find thousands ready to believe. They actually said that nature had turned him out a rough piece of goods, and that he had called in the help of art to improve the handiwork of nature. Well, the hand of art was certainly seen in his dress; but there art is in its legitimate sphere, because nature has nothing to do with dress. But then, they went on to say, nature had meant him to be fifty-six years old; but art had stepped in and given him back (in appearance) at least twenty years of his life.

Of course his highness had friends as well as enemies; and his age became the subject of fierce dispute between the two. Enemies appealed to the parish register; but friends answered them by appealing to his face. There-

upon enemies retorted that highness's face was a work of art : that said art had been guilty of a bit of forgery ; that nature had written 1769 on that face (as the year of its birth), but that art had cleverly changed the 6 into an 8 (easily done !) post-dating the face by twenty years. His friends appealed to his luxuriant brown locks, to show off which his enemies said he so often graciously took off his hat in public : but his enemies shrugged their shoulders, and pointed to a hair-dresser's shop, if luckily there was one in sight ; and, if not, twirled their hair round their fingers. His friends pointed to his brilliant white teeth ; but his enemies, if no dentist's shop were by, maliciously put up their hands to their faces, mimicking the action of a man suffering from toothache. His friends, in despair, brought in the testimony of his smooth and ruddy cheeks, in which not a crease nor a wrinkle was to be seen ; but his enemies wickedly winked, and, though Madame Rachel had not yet risen to fame, broadly hinted that some facial artist made him "beautiful for ever." Well, if Prince Boriatinsky were a work of art, certainly art had achieved a great success. Perhaps it was this very success that had aroused the envy of his enemies. They

went so far as to say that, on the greatest point of all, art had failed; that while nature had made him a *nobleman*, art could not so far improve upon her as to make him a *noble man*.

As to his general demeanour, his enemies said that art reigned supreme there. Nature had made him a bear; and art had fashioned him into a finished gentleman. Well, there is enough of putty and varnish among us in England to prevent any right-minded man from turning the finger of scorn against foreigners. But, for the perfection of high art in that department, commend me to a Russian nobleman. The prince, they said, outshone all his rivals in that line. He was conscious of his greatness: if a man be great, how can he help knowing it? There was a look of self-importance about him, which he did not try to hide (why should he?), and which proclaimed to all the world that he was indeed the high and mighty Prince Boriatinsky. But, with all that, there was a gracious condescension to his inferiors—that is, to all but Majesty and a very few others—which most of them received with thankful meekness. There was something inimitable in the sweet smile with which he enriched his voluptuous mouth, showing his

brilliant teeth in the process ; in the gentle pressure of the soft white fingers, which seemed to be so many pegs for hanging rings upon ; and in the gracious bow, which could scarcely have been better adjusted to the rank of the person he bowed to if it had been regulated by a machine placed within his princely frame. But that very precision was triumphantly seized upon by his enemies as conclusive proof of art. I need scarcely say that his enemies and libellers were almost all men. The fairer sex, with a few exceptions, admired him. If you had asked any of the ladies you met at the ball, barring Helen, they would have told you that he was “a charming man ;” and, if they were not already otherwise disposed of, would most likely have felt a strange flutter of the heart as they spoke.

Well, this fierce dispute has lost its interest for us. Whether Prince Boriatinsky were a work of nature or of art, he so far showed himself the child of nature that he went and fell in love with Helen Cameron. But, even here, his enemies stepped in with their low hints. They maintained that the love was not the offspring of nature, but unmistakably the child of art : not the attraction of soul to soul, but a craving

to supply an artificial need. Nature, they said, had forgotten to give him the power of love; and art, in trying to supply the want, had boggled over the work as usual, and produced a worthless "imitation." How far all this was true we may, perhaps, see in time. But, whatever the feeling was, highness had clearly made up his mind to cherish it, and to carry it out to its legitimate end—whatever that was.

The morning after the ball, he went in state to Mr. Cameron's house. He availed himself of the right, which is reserved to noblemen in Petersburg, of driving four horses. Out-riders went before and after his sledge. The showy *cortège* made quite a stir in the quiet street, and aroused it out of its normal sleepiness. Highness seemed to look on the rabble as a compliment paid to his greatness; and, as he alighted from his sledge in Mr. Cameron's courtyard, the consciousness of that greatness made him statelier and more pompous than ever. Before he reached the drawing-room, where Miss Meldrum and Helen hastened to receive him, he had swelled to such an amazing size (ideally), that the wonder was he did not (ideally) strike the ceiling with his sapient head. He was undeniably small in body;

but he fully made up for it by the largeness of soul with which he credited himself. Helen was in an unmistakable flutter. It *was* an honour for the great Prince Boriatinsky to call on her: in the eyes of the world, the highest tribute that had ever been paid to her charms; and she was as yet too much of a grub to estimate such homage at its true worth. Miss Meldrum looked at her with some anxiety: of course, Helen had told her all about highness, and the high compliments he had paid her. Was she going to have her head turned? Helen dropped a low curtsy. Highness made a "regulation" bow: a bow adjusted to the level of a plebeian, but nicely modified by the unwonted loveliness of the particular plebeian before it. However, to make up for the stiffness of the bow, he put on one of his sweetest smiles, showing his faultless teeth. Helen presented Miss Meldrum. Highness stared at the dear old soul, and, seeing no beauty to qualify her rank, made her one of his stiffest and haughtiest bows.

"Your *gouvernante*, I presume," he said.

"Yes, your Highness, and my kinswoman; my mother's first cousin."

"Oh, indeed: a poor relation, I suppose."

Now "the arbiter of fashion" would have been astounded if any one had told him that he was wanting in delicacy.

"No, your Highness," Helen hastened to say: "she took pity on my babyhood, when my mother died, and has acted as a mother to me ever since. I don't know what I should have done without Miss Meldrum."

Highness bowed rather lower than before, and said pompously:

"Accept my congratulations and my thanks."

"What for?" asked Miss Meldrum, somewhat amused.

"My thanks for the maternal solicitude with which you have educated Miss Cameron, and my congratulations at the glorious success which has attended your exertions," answered the prince.

Highness had clearly appropriated Helen in his own mind; but, as Miss Meldrum was not aware of that interesting fact, she may be forgiven for feeling amused, and asking a trifling question.

"What has your Highness to do with it?"

"Ah, Miss Meldrum, I am not insensible to the attractions of such transcendent beauty; and, though I am a Prince of the Empire,

descended from one of the most ancient and illustrious families in Russia, I am not ashamed to confess that Miss Cameron has excited a profound interest in my bosom."

I grieve to say that Miss Meldrum laughed. The sense of the ludicrous was always strong in her. But she was a lady, and tried to master herself. At length she said :

"In England it is usual to consult the lady first."

"I was not ignorant of that circumstance," answered Prince Boriatinsky; "and therefore I have undertaken this pilgrimage to her shrine, to offer my oblation upon her altar. Accept my devotion, beautiful Miss Cameron: the profound adoration of a nobleman, whom your transcendent beauty has inspired."

And he laid his hand on his heart, bowing very low, and looked as if he were going to add, though he did not, "the profound adoration of 'the male arbiter of fashion'!" What a pity that he did not reach that climax!

Ludicrous as all this was, it had its serious side for Helen. She was still a grub; her views, "of the earth, earthy." Something flattering, to have brought the great Prince Boriatinsky to her feet! Moreover, to be a

princess ! To be first and foremost in St. Petersburg ! Highness, too, not a man to be sneered at: looking not much more than thirty, whatever enemies might say ; in outward appearance, a handsome man ! The fishy eye, half hidden by his habit of closing it, the only thoroughly objectionable part of him !

If highness had unfolded the peculiar state of his feelings before the Feast of the Jordan, I am not sure that Helen would have spurned him at once. In the masterless state of her heart, she might have deemed the princessship tempting enough to warrant the venture. But now there was a barrier in the way. Since she had caught sight of a Byronic hero, no ordinary mortal had a chance with her ; and I must own that the great Prince Boriatinsky, with all his grandeur, had not a touch of Lara or of Manfred in his looks.

“I am much obliged—” Helen began to say.

But highness would not let her finish her sentence. She would have brought in a “but” soon enough, if she had been allowed to go on ; but highness evidently thought there was nothing but an “and” to follow, and looked upon her answer as an acceptance of his offer. Of course !

“My dear Miss Cameron,” he said, “or rather, ‘my dear Helen,’ as our mutual relations will now entitle me to call you; my own magnificent Helen——”

“Hear me out, your Highness.”

Highness, as a rule, not a great talker; but, at times, like a clock, when wound up, would go on ticking for hours. At such times it was hard for any one else to wedge in a word. So it was now. The inner works had been wound up so high by what he deemed Helen’s acceptance of his offer, that he might have been warranted to go for three hours at least.

“There is no necessity for another syllable, my beautiful Helen: I perfectly comprehend all the sensations that have been excited in your charming bosom. You will never repent having accepted my proposal. I will provide you with an establishment which an empress might desiderate; and, indeed, there is not a princess in Europe who will live more sumptuously than my lovely, my adorable Helen.”

“But, your Highness——”

Quite useless to try and stop him: clock wound up; must go on.

“I can perfectly comprehend your reluctance: you have not been accustomed to live

in royal splendour." And he glanced at the handsome and comfortable drawing-room. "But I have an important theory, from which the world may derive some benefit one of these days: that there ought always to be a harmony between a picture and its setting. Nothing offends me more than to see a grand painting in an insignificant frame." Highness prided himself on what he called his "appreciation of art." "Now I maintain that a magnificent creature like my lovely Helen is out of harmony with a plain *bourgeois* house like this. Nothing but a princely palace and a royal establishment would be an adequate frame for such a superb picture."

Poor Helen felt that she must somehow check the torrent of words which was overwhelming her. She therefore burst out :

"Your Highness has misunderstood me altogether. I was going to tell your Highness that I cannot accept your offer."

"You will repent your determination," said the prince, staring at Helen.

"No, never !" cried Helen.

"At any rate, I will give you time to reflect."

"Quite useless, your Highness : I know my mind."

“The period will arrive when you will be grateful to me for allowing you time to reflect. Farewell for the present, my lovely Helen. *Au revoir !* Adieu, adieu, Miss Meldon.”

And highness made a low bow, and stalked majestically away. As he went out, it really needed the ribands and crosses and stars on his breast to show the world that it was not an ordinary mortal, but a great man, that was blessing its eyes. Happy land, where the great men are labelled and ticketed, so that there can be no mistake on that score ! In this country, who is to tell a peer from a commoner, a member of Parliament from an ordinary mortal ? Would it not be an improvement if the six hundred and fifty-eight gentlemen, who are being hatched even as I write, had at least a card pinned to their coat-tails, with the letters “M.P.” printed in big staring characters ?

Since I hope not to meet Prince Boriatinsky for a long time to come, I will dismiss him for the present by saying that for a while he pestered Helen pitilessly. Happily she did not come across him often ; but, whenever she did, she hated the very sight of him.

CHAPTER VII.

THE UNIVERSITY MAN.

“But, in the instant that your messenger came, in loving visitation with me was a young doctor of Rome.”

SHAKSPERE: *Merchant of Venice*.

ONE morning, some weeks later, Miss Meldrum and Helen sat reading in the breakfast-room. They spent most of their mornings there: it was the cosiest room in the house. Helen was now past the age for set lessons; nevertheless Miss Meldrum maintained that it was absurd for a girl of eighteen to think that she had “finished her education,” and gave Helen a regular course of reading in various departments of literature.

As they sat reading, Natalia announced “Captain Maleenovsky.” Miss Meldrum saw that Helen blushed, and drew her own conclusions. There were reasons why she might have been glad at the thought of her falling in love with the gallant guardsman. Frederick Randal was no favourite with her. She honestly believed that he would not make a good husband for Helen. Moreover, she did not

like him on her own account. He was often rude to her, and, more than any one else, made her feel her dependent position. In the pride of youth, he talked of her as a "prim old maid;" and, in the pride of wealth, he thought of her as "only a governess." Captain Maleenovsky, on the other hand, was always courteous and more than courteous to her: he had an eye to see her worth; and he was better able than Randal to judge of her talents and accomplishments. He had made a favourable impression upon her from the first; and, every time she saw him, that impression had been deepened. But Miss Meldrum was far too true a friend to be swayed by such feelings. There was a sacred duty which she owed to Helen; and she had long made up her mind to discharge that duty faithfully. In many senses she was a guardian to the motherless child; and she meant, if she could, to save her from an ill-assorted match. As a matter of theory, she believed that to tie a Russian husband to an English wife would be as bad as binding a lion to a lamb; and, as a matter of fact, while many greatly wondered, in spite of her plainness, that she was still an old maid, she knew that, if she could only have brought

herself to exchange her English name for a Russian, she need not have been Miss Meldrum still. She therefore resolved to watch Maleenovsky narrowly.

He entered with the confidence of a man who was sure of his footing in the house. He was very polite (he always was); but there was an ease in all his movements which showed that he felt quite at home. He had visited the Camerons often enough to make Miss Meldrum anxious, and Frederick Randal jealous. Either Mr. Cameron or Miss Meldrum had always been present at their interviews; and, therefore, even if he had wished it, he could not have spoken of love to the beautiful girl. But love has another language beside that of words. The eye can speak; and the hand can speak. A keen observer might have detected weeks before that Captain Maleenovsky loved Helen Cameron. Even Miss Meldrum might have found it out, if she had not been what Randal called a "prim old maid." As for Helen, she felt it already. And her own feelings toward him? Well, he was still, in some measure, one of Byron's heroes to her: only, unhappily, whenever he was in her presence, his stern, strong face was lighted up with

a sweet smile which was anything but Byronic. As he shook hands with her now, he gave her hand a gentle squeeze, which made the blood mount up to her face. Miss Meldrum made a private note of it in a corner of her mind.

“Always hard at work!” cried Captain Maleenovsky in French. “Why, Mademoiselle Meldrum, you will work her to death!”

And he seated himself as near Helen as he durst, in the hazy state of their relations to each other.

“Then I shall have to—die with her,” answered Miss Meldrum, in her jerkiest style, “because you see that I—work with her.”

“But surely, mademoiselle, the difference in your ages must make some difference.”

“I humbly thank you, monsieur, for—the compliment,” said Miss Meldrum, laughing: “you mean to say that—a dried-up old maid—like myself, should be—tough enough for anything.”

“I humbly beg your pardon, mademoiselle,” answered the captain: “nothing could be farther from my meaning; but surely we middle-aged folks can bear more confinement than the young.”

Miss Meldrum smiled. Was she pleased? Helen laughed outright, and said :

“ You speak as if you were old enough to be my father, monsieur.”

“ I could scarcely claim that honour, mademoiselle,” answered the captain, smiling in his turn.

“ And, do you know, monsieur, Mademoiselle Meldrum is old enough to be my father’s mother.”

Helen Cameron had not as yet learned to regard the feelings of others. Well might Miss Meldrum say (in English):

“ There was no need to bring that in, Helen.”

Nor was there any need for Helen to answer :

“ None whatever.”

She meant that Miss Meldrum’s age was clearly stamped on her face. Well, Captain Maleenovsky was much more polite than Helen. He said :

“ You must be mistaken, mademoiselle.”

But Helen, with all her faults, was, after all, a generous girl. She felt that she had said what might hurt Miss Meldrum’s feelings, and she wanted to make her some atonement.

"But, monsieur, I do not deserve your pity," she said: "I like it; Mademoiselle Meldrum makes everything so interesting."

"I can well believe it," answered Maleenovsky. "May I ask what you are studying now?"

"You can see for yourself."

And Helen handed him the book, forestalling, in her own mind, the amusement which she would feel at his blank look when he found out that it was in English. To her astonishment, Captain Maleenovsky was not nonplussed.

"The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, by Edward Gibbon, Esq.!" he exclaimed.

He pronounced the English so well, that both the ladies were astonished. He had never hinted that he knew English: they had taken for granted that he did not. Helen was in raptures. If there had been one drawback to the pleasure with which she looked on the gallant guardsman, it was the thought that she could not talk with him in her own tongue. The discovery seemed an additional link between the two.

"You know English!" she cried joyfully.

"I have that enjoyment, Miss Cameron: more or less; at least, a little less than more."

Helen burst out laughing. Laughter was one of the things she could never learn to control. Captain Maleenovsky looked at her keenly, as if doubtful whether she were laughing at him or not. But Miss Meldrum tried to frown, and said :

“For shame, Helen !”

“I have probably created some mistake.”

“I beg your pardon, Captain Maleenovsky : it was rude ; but I could not help it.”

“You rude !” exclaimed the captain : “you not can be rude ; no, never no more. I have created a mistake ; but you shall teach me to create no more.”

Poor Helen again burst out laughing. The spell was broken. It had seemed so delightful to think that he knew English ; but the correctness with which he pronounced the words could give her no inkling of the outlandish way in which he would speak the language. Miss Meldrum felt called on to apologise for her pupil.

“You must forgive her,” she said. “Your pronunciation—is very good ; but forgive me, monsieur,—for saying that the order—of the words sounds funny—to English ears.”

“Forgive her ?” exclaimed Captain Malee-

novsky. "And what for forgive? I forgive the enemy; but what for the friend? The friend exists notwithstanding the friend."

Miss Meldrum was herself tickled this time, and joined Helen in her laugh. As if to apologise for her own rudeness, she asked:

"Even the laughing friend?"

"Yes, mademoiselle, even the laughing friend. What for no? The laughing friend is, notwithstanding, the friend laughing; and I love greater to behold the friend laughing as the friend weeping. But you, mademoiselle," added the captain, turning to Helen and bowing, "you shall teach me to create order."

Poor Helen was in hysterics. Captain Ma-leenovsky sat looking at her gravely, every now and then bowing courteously, as though to assure her that he did not feel hurt. As soon as she recovered her speech, she said, casting on him her own bewitching smile:

"I really hope you will forgive me."

"And what for so? The friend laughs, the enemy thrashes. The laugh is the better of the lash. But I admire that you create so learned a book as Gibbon's story your study."

"Perhaps you think—that ladies should not

be—highly educated,” said Miss Meldrum: “they say that few men would choose—blue-stockings for their wives.”

“In the least not,” answered Captain Maleenovsky, bowing. “Happy the man who shall find in his wife not only a shrine of beauty, but also a magazine of blue-stockings.”

“You are a flatterer.”

“I a flatterer! By all means not. How a flatterer? When I arrange the female for my wife, I shall have a mixture—what you call the pepper-and-salt. She shall be composed of two equal parts of beauty and learning; a Miss Cameron for the beauty, and a Miss Meldrum for the blue-stockings. I mix them up into one little pill.”

“I think you will find it a—hard pill to swallow, Captain,” said Miss Meldrum, laughing.

“Hard? Not by every means. What for hard? My wife shall be soft and gentle, mademoiselle.”

“Well, Captain, I think a soft wife would—suit you best,” said Miss Meldrum; “but take care she—is not too soft.”

Captain Maleenovsky turned to Helen, and asked:

“And do you discover ‘The Decline and

Fall of the Roman Empire, by Edward Gibbon, Esq.,' very interesting, Miss Cameron? Very instructive, yes; but very interesting?"

"Very," said Helen.

"My garters! These English ladies! Why, Miss Cameron, 'The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire, by Edward Gibbon, Esq.,' is said to be the most learned story in the English scriptures."

"What do you know about Gibbon's 'Decline and Fall?'" asked a voice behind him.

It came from Frederick Randal, who had entered the room unannounced. He took advantage of every chance he had of snubbing the officer. It was clear that he was not overjoyed at finding "the conceited coxcomb," as he called him, in such close neighbourhood to Helen Cameron. There was a cloud upon his handsome face: his eyes were fierce; and his lips twitched nervously. The tone in which he had spoken was that of contempt; but there was far more of anger and jealousy than of contempt in his soul. Captain Maleenovsky was always courteous to him; but a keen observer might easily have seen that sometimes it was hard for him to master himself. At the present time, though he bowed politely, Helen,

who sat nearest to him, could hear him muttering :

“ The little dog ! ”

Believing that he meant to say “ The puppy ! ” Helen burst out again into a peal of laughter. Her mirth, unexplained as it was, enraged Randal still more. Miss Mel-drum cried :

“ For shame, Mr. Randal ! ”

“ Mr. Randal probably the profound scholar ? ” said Captain Maleenovsky, bowing politely.

“ At least I am a university man,” answered Randal, taking a seat on the other side of Helen.

He spoke in a tone which seemed to say : “ With all your stupid blundering you have hit the mark, though I am too proud to own the soft impeachment.”

“ I moreover a university man,” replied Captain Maleenovsky, again bowing politely ; “ and I have seen enough of the university life to ascertain that the university man and the profound scholar are the two separate essences. Sometimes combined ; but frequentlier decomposed.”

“ You a university man ! ” exclaimed Frederick. “ I did not know that the officers of

the Russian army ever went to college. Pray, which university were you at, sir?"

He spoke in a tone which said: "I believe you are telling a lie, sir!" Captain Maleenovsky had a great mind to say something cutting. But he controlled himself, and merely shrugged his shoulders, saying:

"The University of St. Petersburg."

"Oh, ay!" answered Randal scornfully. "I had forgotten that there was such a thing as a university here. Some difference between Oxford and Petersburg I should say!"

"What for a difference? To the damage of Petersburg?"

"Rather!"

"In what special?"

"Classics, and all that sort of thing."

"Classics!" said Captain Maleenovsky. "You not know, sir, that Professor Herrmann, who (*en passant*) is a German, has acquired the estimation (reputation?) to become one of the biggest Greek scholars in Europe, and one of the largest teachers in the universe? As much for the classics; and for the mathematics——"

"Bother the mathematics!"

"What for so? What for shall I bother the mathematics? I shall not bother them;

but I shall learn them. And for the scientifics and the young languages, I discover that, in the English universities, they do not create of the curriculum a part at all; whereas we at St. Petersburg are haughty of the sufficiency (efficiency?) with which they are taught, and of the difference (distinction?) which our students have acquired in the meadow (field?) of the scientifics and the young languages."

"Confound the sciences and the modern languages!"

"And what for so? Wherefore should I confound them? I wish to keep them distinct. To confound them is not the most beneficent way to create them clear and intelligent."

"We don't go to the universities to learn science and the modern languages," exclaimed Randal.

"And what for no? What for a university not universal? What for not the seat for all learning?"

"Confound the fellow!" muttered Frederick through his teeth. Then aloud he added: "I say, Helen, can we not have a word together in private?"

Helen had listened to the foregoing conversation with some amusement. All the while,

she had been watching the two speakers with deep interest. Frederick Randal had not come off with flying colours. His rudeness and scornfulness had acted as a foil to the courtesy, calmness, and self-mastery, which Captain Maleenovsky had shown under much provocation. Helen could not but admire the cool politeness with which he bore all Randal's ill-breeding. In fact, Fred, by his behaviour, was cutting his own throat. Helen thought that she had never before seen him look so small. And she answered, laughing :

“How can that be, when we are not in private?”

“We can go to the next room.”

“And so leave my guest? That *would* be taking a leaf out of your book.”

“He will have Miss Meldrum to amuse him. But what do you mean by taking a leaf out of my book?”

“You have set us all an example of courtesy, which, I suppose, you think it becomes us to follow—if we can.”

“As Mr. Randal has the desire to speak to you in the private, it will be for me most beneficent to withdraw myself,” said Captain Maleenovsky politely.

“By no means,” answered Helen, with as much dignity as her risible faculties would allow: “you are my guest; and I wish you to remain as long as you purposed to stay.”

Randal had risen; but he resumed his seat, and sat boiling with jealousy and rage. Had he been making a fool of himself before that hateful Russian officer? What would he not give for his non-existence, or, at least, his non-acquaintance with Helen Cameron? It seemed to him that, as Helen was just on the point of surrendering herself to his love, that “conceited coxcomb” had stepped in and coolly cut him out, and was now bearing her away in triumph. The scoundrel!

In the meanwhile, Captain Maleenovsky and Helen went on talking as if nothing had happened to disturb the harmony of the party. Miss Meldrum every now and then joined in their talk. But her pitiful heart took pity on the young Englishman who had so often scorned and flouted her. All honour to the “prim old maid!” She saw how much Randal was hurt, and she cunningly laid a plan for leaving him alone with Helen. Turning to Captain Maleenovsky, she said as persuasively as her jerking style would allow:

“I believe you have—not seen our conservatories—Captain Maleenovsky: would you like me to show you them?”

“Delighted!” answered the captain.

“I will show them to you, and leave Miss Meldrum to amuse Mr. Randal,” said Helen.

And she rose, made a low curtsy to Fred, and left the room with Captain Maleenovsky.

CHAPTER VIII.

LOVE'S LABOUR LOST.

“Our wooing doth end like an old play :
Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy
Might well have made our sport a comedy.”

SHAKSPERE: *Love's Labour Lost.*

THE faults in Frederick Randal's character were in some measure the fruits of his training. He was clever, and, if rightly trained, might have become, not only a good man of business, but also a useful member of society. But the marks of talent, which came out in his boyhood, led his father to think that he was a great genius, and must be trained into a great scholar and a great statesman. Old Mr. Randal was proud of his son: being a wealthy man, he spared no cost to fit his son for a high career, and proudly looked forward to the time when Frederick Randal would make his voice heard in Parliament, and perhaps even sway the destinies of Great Britain. Now nature had not cut him out for such a career; and the training which was meant to fit him for it, nearly unfitted him for that narrower

sphere in which he might have shone. Such is life !

When shall we learn that the difference between one character and another is nearly as marked as that between a cat and a dog, and that no amount of training will enable the most distinguished member of the by no means contemptible feline race to unfold into a noble mastiff? In the education of the young, the great thing is to adapt the training to the character. It would be silly to ask from any character more than it can give. Think you, by any amount of discipline, you can unfold a dullard into a genius? As well rear a wild thorn, and, by carefully tending and manuring it, expect it to grow up into a rose-tree !

As an only son, Frederick had been petted and spoilt. What with his not overwise parents, and what with flattering friends always ready to find out something great in the heir of a millionaire, he had been told of his cleverness so often, that he had devout faith in it himself. He became conceited : learnt to think of himself as first and foremost in everything ; fancied that every one else must bow to his will ; never thought

of curbing his temper or mastering himself. His college life made matters worse. He had almost unlimited command of money ; cut a great swell, and was known as "the son of the great millionaire." When he returned to St. Petersburg, he was unfit to enter business : though he went to the counting-house every day, it was a mere farce ; and, much to his father's annoyance and grief, his real life was that of "a swell upon town." He was not a bad fellow at heart. A look at his pleasant, handsome face would have told you that he was made for better things. But, owing chiefly to unwise training, his powers were utterly wasted ; and his character was fast dwindling down into the thin, watery, wish-washy sort.

That character had already revealed itself in his tussle with Captain Maleenovsky ; and when the captain had gone out with Helen, it laid its weakness still more bare. Left alone with Miss Meldrum, Fred paced the room with agony and rage. Jealousy was devouring him within. Ah, Helen did not know how much she had to answer for in the building up of that rickety character ! Miss Meldrum tried to soothe him, but for a long

time without success. He paid her no heed whatever.

“The cruel jilt!” he exclaimed again and again; “the hollow, heartless coquette!”

He repeated these words so often that Miss Meldrum became excited in turn. She loved Helen dearly; and, whatever she herself might think of her pupil's behaviour, she could not brook those terms when applied to her by others. She fluttered like a young girl: her glorious black eyes sent out sparks of fire; and, when at length she spoke, her style was jerkier than ever.

“Mr. Randal!” she said indignantly: “do you apply—those objectionable observations—to Miss Cameron?”

Randal still gave no heed. He repeated the “objectionable observations” over and over again as he paced the room, and added:

“And to leave me for that conceited coxcomb!”

Miss Meldrum lost all patience.

“You are not speaking—the truth, Mr. Randal!” she exclaimed: “you know you are not.”

And this time she spoke so emphatically, and in so loud a voice, that he was forced to

hear. He arrested his steps for a moment, and, facing Miss Meldrum, fiercely asked :

“What do you mean?”

“Miss Cameron is *not* a cruel jilt!” answered Miss Meldrum; “she is *not* a heartless coquette!”

“Why did she leave me, then, to go with that beastly villain? I should like to give him a good thrashing; the sneaking rascal, to prowl about here in my absence and steal away——”

Miss Meldrum would not let him finish the sentence.

“Why?” she said; “why, to make up—for your rudeness—to be sure. Do you think she could—see her friend—insulted in this house—without showing—that she did not approve—of the insult?”

“Her friend?”

“Ay! *her* friend—*my* friend—every one’s friend; more than I can say—for *you*!”

“She seems to have a talent for deserting old friends and picking up new ones. The cruel jilt!”

“And how dare you call—Captain Maleenovsky a beastly villain—and a sneaking rascal?” continued Miss Meldrum. “He is

far more—of a gentleman—than you. If you do not—respect yourself—at least respect—a lady's presence; and another time think—twice before you use—objectionable words—which are always banished—from polite society.”

“She has behaved abominably.”

“And what right have you—to challenge Miss Cameron's conduct—at all? What claim have you—on her? Is she your wife?”

“She has given me reason to hope that she will be.”

“What do you mean, Mr. Randal? As far as I have seen—she has always looked—on your attentions—as a bore.”

“Oh!” cried Fred sharply, as if with a sudden pang. “If I thought so! It would kill me!”

His whole tone had changed in a moment. A leap from anger to sorrow! He sank into a chair and buried his face in his hands. The passing glimpse of agony, which Miss Meldrum had seen in his face, touched her tender heart. All his conceit and ill-humour had vanished; and the true man stood out before her, such as God had meant him to be. Her heart relented toward him: she took his hand in hers, and spoke in a kindly voice.

“Take my advice, Frederick Randal,” she said: “it is kindly meant. I knew your father and mother—when they were children; and I cannot but take—a deep interest in your welfare—for their sakes at least—if not for your own. Get rid of your self-conceit—and your ill-temper; and who knows—you may win—Helen Cameron yet.”

At any other time Randal would have flown into a rage at such a speech as this. But he was too deeply humbled for that. He burst into tears, and, pressing Miss Meldrum’s hand, cried out passionately:

“God knows I would do anything to win her love! I could become a beggar: I could cut off my right hand: I could die!”

Miss Meldrum was touched: good, kindly soul, it was never a hard task to move her. She returned the pressure of his hand.

“I see now that your love—is real and deep,” she answered. “Be always what you—are now; and Helen Cameron may learn—to love you yet.”

“Oh, dear Miss Meldrum, I will always be grateful to you for this. You will help me, won’t you?”

“No one can help you much: you must

learn to help yourself. It is you that must win her."

At this moment Helen entered the room alone, laughing and looking remarkably happy. The sight of her bright, joyous face filled Randal with foreboding. What had made her so happy? Had "the conceited coxcomb" been making love to her? The very thought of it re-awakened all his anger and jealousy. His face changed again in a moment, and assumed its look of sullen resentment. Why, even Miss Meldrum was vexed with Helen for looking so happy at such an unseasonable time.

"What do you think, auntie?" said Helen, still laughing: "Captain Maleenovsky says that our garden is the loveliest spot in St. Petersburg."

"He could scarcely have made—a profounder remark—if he had been a great—philosopher," answered Miss Meldrum sarcastically.

"He thinks he could be happy there all day."

"With you in it, I suppose," said Fred.

"Oh, of course," answered Helen, laughing: "I fancy he could scarcely picture it to himself without such an important being as myself in it. I think that last remark of Fred's was

profounder than Captain Maleenovsky's. I suppose he is growing to be 'a great philosopher.' What do you say, auntie?"

"I say that you are the most—provoking creature!" cried Miss Meldrum, feeling angry with Helen.

"Thank you!" said Helen, curtsying demurely to Miss Meldrum. Then, turning toward Randal, she added: "I leave that honour to wiser folks; to the learned men and the great philosophers!"

"Helen!" exclaimed Randal angrily: "I must come to an explanation with you."

"An explanation! What about? Have you broken your eye-glass, or soiled your shirt frill, or lost your scented pomatum? What weighty business engages the attention of the learned Mr. Randal, the great philosopher—the *university man*?"

And she mimicked the pompous tone and manner in which he had said to Captain Maleenovsky: "I am a university man!" Helen was a first-rate mimic; and Miss Meldrum could not help laughing, in spite of her inward protest. She did manage at length to say:

"For shame, Helen!"

"Oxford, not Petersburg," continued Helen,

still mimicking Randal's pompous tone and manner to the life: "some difference between Oxford and Petersburg, I should say."

"Will you never be serious, Helen?" asked Fred.

Ah, he would soon find out that she *could* be serious!

"Serious!" cried Helen: "I think I am serious enough in all conscience. Serious! Why, the sight of your—interesting face, lengthened in such an alarming way, would be enough to make an oyster serious."

"Don't provoke me beyond endurance."

"No: I leave that to you. If a certain gentleman had not been an angel for temper, we should have had a duel here to-day. No! I shall not compete with the university man in the art of provoking. If you have learnt nothing else at college, you have learnt *that*. Are there prizes given at Oxford for temper? If there had been, you would certainly have carried away the first prize; and I remember now you did not get any prize at all. What a pity there was no prize for temper!"

"I call Miss Meldrum to witness——"

"Are you going to drag me to a court of justice, and bring witnesses to prove my guilt?"

Though you *are* a university man—Oxford, not Petersburg” (again mimicking his tone and manner), “it will take a cleverer man than you to beat me.”

“Helen, you have behaved badly to me.”

“Behaved badly to you! Have I trod on your corns, or pinched your ear, or pulled your hair, or knocked out your teeth? When you were insulting Captain Maleenovsky, I had a great mind to give you a slap on your university face. I didn’t: the more’s the pity! Now, then, bring on your charges against me. Out with them all!”

Poor Randal was so overcome by Helen’s raillery that he could not speak. Miss Meldrum lifted up her forefinger and whispered:

“Helen, don’t forget yourself.”

But Helen had been so thoroughly aroused that she was beyond Miss Meldrum’s control. Seeing that Randal did not speak, she went on to say, in her most sarcastic tone:

“Well, why are you dumb, Fred? Can’t the university man make a speech? Speak, man, speak: give a learned ‘explanation’ of my high crimes and misdemeanours. Expound the law in the latest university fashion; and

give us outsiders a sample of the great talents which that ancient seat of learning—Oxford, not Petersburg—has brought to perfection.”

“But you won’t listen to me.”

“Won’t listen to you! What do you mean? What have I been doing but trying to listen to you; waiting, and waiting in vain, for the eloquent speech which has never come, but which is no doubt on its way from your university brain? Won’t listen to you, indeed! Why, I am dying to hear your speech, O learned university man!”

“You don’t hear me out: as soon as I begin, you take the words out of my mouth and twist them to your own purposes.”

“I should have thought that your university training would have taught you a remedy for that!” cried Helen, laughing. “But I’ll interrupt you no more. Speak on then, learned doctor; and I will listen with profound attention. Only, in pity to my untutored brain, don’t make your oration too learned or too long; or I shall fall asleep over it, as sure as my name is Helen Cameron.”

Up to this time Helen had been standing; but she now sat down and settled herself in a listening attitude.

“Surely,” said Randal, “you cannot deny that you have been flirting with Captain Maleenovsky?”

Having uttered this, he paused, as if waiting for an answer. Helen sat dumb, with a mock-attentive air; screwing up her pretty mouth, as though she were keeping down a strong impulse to laugh. Randal found this mockery harder to bear than even her raillery. The dumb show lasted for nearly a minute.

“Go on,” urged Helen at length: “I am listening to your learned oration, of which, O university man, you have given us only the exordium.”

“Why don’t you answer me, then?” cried Randal.

He was vexed beyond measure by the trifling manner in which Helen received his lecture.

“Surely this learned doctor is the most unreasonable man in the world,” answered Helen, bursting into a laugh. “Just now he was scolding me for talking; and now he scolds me for *not* talking. Which am I to do, most learned doctor?—talk, or not talk? ‘To be, or not to be, that’s the question?’”

“Answer my question, Helen!” continued

Randal: "can you deny that you have been flirting with Captain Maleenovsky?"

For a moment Helen fired up: her merry humour seemed gone. With glowing cheeks and dilated nostrils, she cried:

"I can and I do deny it. But, if I could not, what then? What have *you* to do with it? What right have you to question me on the subject?"

"Oh, Helen, after all that has passed between us!"

"What has passed between us?"

"Have you not given me reason to believe that my suit was not distasteful to you?"

"And I am to be responsible for every foolish belief that may creep into your—university brain?" said Helen, relapsing into her merry mood, and laughing again. "By-and-by, you may cleverly bring yourself to believe that I am engaged to you! But, whatever silly things you may have believed in the past, believe this in the future—that you are no more to me than any of the silly young men who utter nonsense in one's ear."

"Oh, Helen!"

"You have yourself to thank for it. I have long found it hard to put up with your bad

temper and self-conceit; but your rudeness to one who has never done you wrong, who has always treated you with a courtesy which you are not gentleman enough to understand or return, has cancelled any bond which your fancy has pictured between us. I have done with you."

"It is as I feared," cried Fred: "that Captain Maleenovsky has stepped in between us."

"Henceforth cease to trouble yourself about anything relating to me or Captain Maleenovsky."

"Helen, dear, don't hit so hard," said Miss Meldrum, pitying Randal: "you see he is down."

And, indeed, there was room for pity. Frederick had again buried his face in his hands; and he sat trying to hide, as well as to control, the feelings which Helen's merciless severity called forth. Without another word, Helen herself passed out of the room. Miss Meldrum tried to comfort the young man. Quite useless!

CHAPTER IX.

THE SCAPEGRACE.

“*Bassanio*. . . . To you, Antonio,
I owe the most, in money and in love;
And from your love I have a warranty
To unburden all my plots and purposes,
How to get clear of all the debts I owe.”

SHAKSPERE: *Merchant of Venice*.

AFTER leaving Mr. Cameron's house, Captain Maleenovsky went to the barrack where his regiment was. In the evening he repaired to his lodgings, not far from the barrack. Of course he had his rooms in the barrack, like the other officers. But, beside being a soldier, he was something of a scholar as well; and, being liable to never-ending interruptions (one might call them irruptions) from his brother-officers in the barrack, he, as a man of wealth and standing, had got leave to hire lodgings, where he retired whenever he wished to carry on his studies.

The house in which he lodged was large. Ground-floor taken up by a public bazaar on the one side and a number of shops on the other. First-floor, sacred to a prince, a count,

and some retired generals. Second-floor, shared by Captain Maleenovsky, with a brace of judges, and a number of retired colonels and majors. Third-floor, as being nearest the sky, and cut up into very small rooms, filled with a swarm of families belonging to the lower classes. So here was a whole community, living in one house, holding in its ample bosom all classes of society, from the highest to the lowest. And yet these people, living in the same house, and many of them meeting every day, knew nothing of one another !

A large stone staircase, common to all, ran up to the top. On each story a wide landing-place, branching out into several corridors, led to the various suites of rooms. Captain Maleenovsky mounted the staircase to the second-floor. Snatching one of many candlesticks which stood on a table in the landing-place, and lighting the candle at another which stood burning on the table, he traversed one of the corridors, and reached his own rooms. There he found Vanka, his valet, in the ante-room. Tired of waiting for his master, the poor fellow had fallen asleep. But he jumped up as soon as he heard the well-known footstep, and was ready with his services.

Captain Maleenovsky took off his uniform in the ante-room, put on a comfortable dressing-gown, and was about to pass on to the inner room, when Vanka told him that a gentleman was awaiting him within. A cloud came over the captain's face. Farewell to his hope of quiet study, then! What gentleman? Lieutenant Alexeyev. Oh, only Alexeyev! And, without any more ado, Captain Maleenovsky went in.

Lounging in an easy-chair, smoking a pipe, the stem of which was five feet long, the bowl resting on the floor, sat Lieutenant Alexeyev. In spite of deeply-marked traces of dissipation, his face was remarkably pleasing and winning, beside being strikingly handsome. One felt drawn towards him, without knowing why. Figure symmetrical and elegant, but somewhat slender and small. A carelessness about his dress, which the severe martinets then at the head of the army must have highly disapproved, which, indeed, was scarcely in keeping with the habits of a finished gentleman, but was nevertheless in tone with the whole bearing of the man himself. An easy, lounging, careless nature! He seemed quite at his ease, as if he felt at home; and, when he spoke,

there was a nonchalance about his tone and manner in striking contrast to Captain Maleenovsky's stern look and studied courtesy. But Captain Maleenovsky himself seemed to catch his friend's spirit. He rushed up to Lieutenant Alexeyev as soon as he saw him, and, eagerly pressing his hand, said :

"There you are again, old boy: heartily glad to see you; though, good-for-nothing fellow that you are, you are going to rob the Muses of a precious evening."

Lieutenant Alexeyev did not rise from his seat, but coolly shook hands with Maleenovsky, scarcely changing his posture, and went on smoking as before.

"Hang the Muses!" he drawled out in a sleepy tone. "That is to say, if there's any of them left to hang. Have so often hung, drawn, and quartered them before, that I had hoped the pestilent race was exterminated. Heartless coquettes, whose mission in life is to rob a man of his friend! Hang them, I say!"

He seemed not to have energy enough to carry out his own decree, if he had the power. An easy, careless, shambling fellow!

"At any rate, they have not robbed you of

me, Vassinka," answered Captain Maleenovsky warmly.

"Not so sure of that, old fellow," said Lieutenant Alexeyev, in a tone which strongly contrasted with his friend's: "that remains to be seen; and perhaps I may have to test it to-night. One never knows how soon one may lose one's friend. About the deepest bit of philosophy that our poor, crazy world has yet reached, is the profound maxim: 'Treat your friend as if he were some day to become your enemy; and your enemy as if he were some day to become your friend.'"

"All right, old boy," answered Captain Maleenovsky: "I know there is a warm corner in your heart, which you don't like to uncover even to an old friend. *Very* profound maxim— isn't it?"

"I say, old fellow, are we not lapsing a little into sentimentalism: not much; but just a little, you know? Just a smack of the days when we vowed eternal friendship, &c., &c., at Doobeenovka: eh, my old friend?"

"Never fear, my good—enemy that is to be."

"But, I say, are you not going to offer incense to the god of weeds? Best cure going for sentimentalism: I know from long and painful

experience," he added, putting on the most sentimental tone he could command, and emphasising the last words.

"To be sure I am," answered the captain, laughing.

Captain Maleenovsky rang the bell, and ordered a pipe. Vanka brought one as long as Lieutenant Alexeyev's, and handed it to his master.

"Ah, now you look at home!" said Alexeyev.

The lieutenant himself looked more like the master of the house than his host. Well, he was one to feel at home wherever he went.

"And what ill wind has blown you here this time, Vassinka?" asked Captain Maleenovsky: "I know by long and painful experience" (mimicking Alexeyev, and doing it well) "that you never come to me except when you are in a scrape."

The idea of trouble or sorrow seemed utterly out of keeping with Alexeyev's merry face and easy manner. A man to take everything lightly and coolly; to go through the world unscathed, one would have thought.

"And what is a friend good for, except to get a man out of a scrape?" drawled out Lieutenant Alexeyev.

He said it with the utmost coolness and nonchalance. There was always so much banter and *persiflage* about him, that it was often hard to know what he meant and what he didn't. But Maleenovsky thought he understood his friend thoroughly. He answered, laughing :

"So, when you've sucked the orange, you'd throw the peel away?"

"Know a trick worth two of that," said Lieutenant Alexeyev: "*keep* the peel, because, you see, I might want it another day. But aren't we going too deep into the philosophy of—oranges—eh, old friend?"

There had been a merry twinkle in his bright eyes; and his drawling manner had been slightly, very slightly, quickened.

"Well then, tell me about your present scrape, Vassinka," said Captain Maleenovsky.

"Creditors dunning one, and all that."

"Your creditors!" exclaimed Maleenovsky: "why, Vassinka, we paid them all off before Christmas. You have surely not contracted any fresh debts so soon?"

"No, not all."

"But you said they were all you had."

"Did I? I was mistaken then."

He spoke with the utmost nonchalance.

The thought of shame in the affair seemed never to have entered his head. He saw only one side of the shield: that on which "Ill-luck" was written. That on which he might have read the word "sin" he kept out of sight.

"Oh, Vassinka!" said Captain Maleenovsky: "you solemnly assured me you had no other creditors."

His earnest tone and unmistakable sorrow would have stung a finer nature. But Alexeyev had a rhinoceros hide to his back, from which all shafts, save, perhaps, those of wit, glanced aside.

"But how is one to find all one's creditors?" he asked, as coolly as ever: "Name, Legion. Story of Hydra's heads: knock one down, and ten others spring up in his room."

"And you are not a Hercules to crush them."

"Shouldn't wish to be, old fellow! A more graceful kind of hero to my taste."

"I think," said Maleenovsky, "the best thing you can do is to get yourself whitewashed, and begin life afresh with a clean balance-sheet."

"Impossible! Imperial Highness, and all that! What would he say?"

"He would say that you were an honest

man to get rid of your debts," answered Maleenovsky, sending out a long puff of smoke.

"Ridiculous! Just think of it! 'His honour, Lieutenant Alexeyev, aide-de-camp to his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Nikolay Pavlovitch, appeared yesterday in the Bankruptcy Court.* Innumerable creditors; no end of debts. No assets forthcoming.' Ruin for life!"

"Not greater ruin than your present course."

"Isn't it though? Profound wisdom in the old Spartan maxim: that a crime is no crime till it is found out."

"As profound as the Spartans themselves: the brainless bullies of Greece. But let us hear your tale."

"Been good boy of late: laying by money, and all that. Brought a lot with me, this morning, to pay rascally tradesmen. But, as I walk up the Nevskoy Prospect, money in hand, whom should I meet but pretty little Katinka?"

"Ah, my dear Vassinka, I wish you would give up that girl," exclaimed Captain Maleenovsky earnestly. "She drains you of more than money: she is sucking up your very life-blood."

* What answers to the Bankruptcy Court in England.

“Lapsing into sentimentalism—eh? Just a little, you know. Your pipe is out: take another, old fellow. Best cure going.”

“My dear fellow, I wish you would be serious just for one minute in your life.”

“What’s the good of preaching to me, old boy?” said Alexeyev, with the utmost nonchalance. “Been preaching away these years: preachments all slide off, like rain off a duck’s back. What’s a fellow to do? One must have some joy in one’s life.”

“A sorry kind of joy it is!”

“Don’t know Katinka: dearest little creature in the world.”

“An expensive joy, too: not worth its salt.”

“Can’t get anything for nothing.”

“You left all your money with Katinka?”

“No, not all: brought lots with me; several hundred roubles. But, as I leave Katinka, whom should I meet but Anton Vasseelitch?”

“So you are still in with that set of sharpers?”

“What’s a fellow to do? Can’t cast off old friends like old clothes, you know. One’s conscience won’t let one.”

“I should not have much scruple about a set of sharpers,” said Maleenovsky.

“No, not sharpers: honourable play, and all that. Only one has such bad luck. It’s all luck.”

“Why don’t you give it up, then?”

“What’s a fellow to do? One must have a spree sometimes, you know.”

“I don’t see any ‘must’ about it. You may just as well say: ‘One must commit murder sometimes.’”

“Well, no doubt even that must be an agreeable change in the dull monotony of existence.”

“But go on with your tale: you went home with Anton Vasseelitch, I suppose?”

“Yes; and, as ill-luck would have it, two other fellows dropped in.”

“And you did not suspect, you dear old simpleton, that Anton Vasseelitch had sent for them?”

“What nonsense!” exclaimed Alexeyev, with more warmth than he had hitherto shown.

“Well, of course, as there were four of us, nothing would do but we must sit down to a rubber of whist.”

“And, of course, these precious gentlemen robbed you of all the money that Katinka had left?”

“No, not robbed. Honourable play, and all

that. One of them was my own partner, you know."

"O you guileless victim! So keen and quick-witted in all but your own affairs! So sceptical in your philosophy, and so credulous in your practice! And so you never dreamt that there might be a fair division of the spoils behind your back! So you lost all your money?"

"To the last kopeck."

"Did it never strike you that you ought to have paid your creditors rather than these precious—gentlemen?"

"What do you mean, old fellow? The one, a debt of honour; the others, mere trumpery tradesmen's accounts!"

"And did it never strike you, Vassinka, that the tradesmen, who had given you money's worth, had a greater right to the money than the—hem!—gentlemen who had given you—nothing?"

"Sentimentalism again—eh? Just a little, you know. Take another pipe, old fellow."

"So goes the world! Well, old boy, I have no ready money by me; and it is too late to get any to-night. But I will see what I can do for you in the morning: will that do?"

“Very well,” answered Alexeyev coolly ;
“I knew you’d help a fellow in distress. Well,
a friend——”

“Lapsing into sentimentalism—eh ?” said Maleenovsky, mimicking his friend’s manner.

“You haven’t heard the worst of it, old fellow. Fact is, can’t return to-night to the Palace.”

The Aneetchkin Palace, where the Grand Duke Nicholas lived.

“Why not ?”

“Rascally tradesmen have placed a strong patrol before palace-gates ; threaten to kick up a shindy if I try to get in before paying their dirty bills.”

“Wheugh !”

“Just think of it : a row before palace-gates ! Imperial Highness, and all that. What would highness say ? Ugh !”

“Well, I confess I should not like to incur his displeasure. He is a terrible one to have to do with in a scrape. His eye is enough to wither one up. I would not stand in your shoes, old boy : not for a good deal.”

“But just think of those rascally tradesmen proceeding to such extremities. Isn’t it shameful ?”

“On whose part?” asked Maleenovsky slily.

“And in these days one daren’t even lather their backs for them.”

“But, as you say, ‘What’s a fellow to do?’ If they can’t get their money in any other way, you know——”

“The sons of ——! Why can’t they wait?”

“What if they have creditors of their own, who dun *them* as they dun you?”

“Serve them right! I’ll take care they have no more of my custom, the dirty rascals!”

“Would not that be too heavy a punishment for their crime, heinous as it is?” said Captain Maleenovsky, laughing. “Just think of it: it would cut them to the heart! Because you must be a remarkably profitable customer: what with leaving their business to look after you, and hiring strong patrols to waylay you at the palace-gates, you must be worth a mint of money to them.”

“They know how to fleece a fellow when they catch him, as they always do in the end.”

“But tell me, Vassinka, how much money did you lose at Anton Vasseelitch’s?”

“One hundred and fifty-four roubles.”

“Well, my friend, I’m really sorry for you; and I hope that it will be a lesson for the

future, and that you will never dream of playing with Anton Vasseelitch or any of his friends again."

"Take a pipe," said Alexeyev: "just a little, you know; just a touch of it. Best cure going. Many a time had a touch of it myself."

"You can have a bed here," answered his friend. "Only I have to go out to-night."

"Aha, that's the way you sacrifice to the Muses? One of the Graces, and not a Muse at all—eh?"

"I hope I shan't be away very long," said Captain Maleenovsky, going out.

Nevertheless the time did seem very long to Lieutenant Alexeyev. He smoked pipe after pipe, lounging in the easy-chair. He rose several times, and looked at the pictures on the walls. He took up book after book. At length, weary of doing nothing, he threw himself on a sofa and fell asleep. How long he slept, he did not know; but he was awake by his friend entering the room.

"Well, was she a pretty one?" he asked.

"At any rate she was kind," answered Captain Maleenovsky: "look here what she has sent you."

And he put a bundle of bank-notes into

Alexeyev's hand. The young scapegrace glanced at them, and looked bewildered. He felt sure that they were the very same notes that he had brought with him from the Aneetchkin Palace in the morning; but how Captain Maleenovsky could have alighted on them, he could not for the life of him tell. That look of unruffled good-humour and nonchalance, which seemed a part of his nature, was slightly, just slightly, shaken.

"Where in the world did you get these from?" he asked.

"I first called on 'pretty little Katinka;' and when she heard of the state you were in, she cried, and not only returned me the money you gave her, but begged me to take her purse. Of course, I declined."

"Needn't have been quite so scrupulous, old fellow," said Alexeyev: "she's had thousands from me first and last. No harm in using one's own at a pinch—eh?"

Captain Maleenovsky looked queerly at his friend for a moment, as if doubting whether those were his real sentiments, or a part of his *persiflage*, and then continued:

"She is a good little girl, after all; and I won't say another word against her."

Lieutenant Alexeyev burst out laughing.

"Aha!" he cried: "she's caught you too—has she? Katinka, then, was the Grace that detained you so long?"

"By no means," answered Captain Maleenovsky gravely. "I had plenty to do besides to get all these notes. I called on my friend Mr. Tolstoy, who is in the secret police; and we called together on your friend Anton Vasseelitch."

Here, for the first time, Lieutenant Alexeyev lost his matchless coolness, and became rather excited.

"Not compromised me—eh?" he said anxiously.

"By no means."

"Nuisance, though: they'll call me informer and police-spy."

"No matter what they call you, so long as they don't rob you," answered Captain Maleenovsky sternly. "But never fear: we made them understand that you had nothing to do with the affair."

"How did you get the money back, then?"

"It was enough for Mr. Tolstoy to mention the name of 'the terrible Count Golovin.' You should have seen the consternation which fell

on all in the room. I never saw anything to match the eagerness with which they got rid of their ill-gotten pelf."

"Were there many there?"

"Only the three, and the pigeon they were plucking. A plumper pigeon than they had this morning."

"Who?"

"His highness Prince Donskoy. I fancy they have bled him well."

"Well, old friend, of course much obliged, and all that sort of thing. Still, unpleasant to be suspected."

"Never fear that; though I, for one, should be glad of that or anything else that would break your connection with that set. There is no fear of their plucking you again: Mr. Tolstoy told them that, if ever you lost money to any one of them again, 'the terrible Count Golovin' would be down upon them."

Supper was here brought in; and, after supper, the two friends sat smoking and drinking till a late hour of the night.

CHAPTER X.

CAPTAIN MALEENOVSKY'S FAILING.

"They say, best men are moulded out of faults;
And, for the most, become much more the better
For being a little bad: so may my husband."

SHAKSPEARE: *Measure for Measure.*

CAPTAIN MALEENOVSKY could not sleep that night. The insult he had received from Frederick Randal, before the lady he loved, kept rankling in his breast. He had taken it coolly at the time; but he had felt it none the less. And now, as he looked back on what took place, he doubted whether he had done well. Had he not been too tame? Would not Helen think him a weak, poor-spirited creature, who could not hold his own? Ah! if he could have known what she really thought!

Lying there, tossing in bed, he thought of many things; but at last his thoughts settled on his friend. Their fathers had been neighbours in the Government of Novgorod; and the two young men had known each other from childhood. Of the same age, they had

always been fast friends. But after leaving the Cadet Corps, which both had entered and left at the same time, Maleenovsky, being of a studious turn, had gone to the University: hence, Alexeyev had the start of him by some years in the army; and yet, though they both had the same advantages, Maleenovsky had reached the rank of captain, whereas Alexeyev was still a mere lieutenant, and, as far as one could see, was likely to remain so all his life. The cause lay in the characters of the two men.

Lieutenant Alexeyev was one of those easy, shiftless, aimless fellows, who are said to do harm to none but themselves. (A great mistake, by-the-bye. If you do yourself harm, you must hurt others too. The best thing you can do for your neighbours is just to make yourself as great and good as you can.) Well, Lieutenant Alexeyev did himself no good. He was everlastingly getting into scrapes of one sort or another. It was seldom indeed that he was out of hot water for a long time. And yet, like a cat, however roughly tossed, he always alighted on his feet. If he had a genius for getting into scrapes, he had also a genius for getting out of them, or rather for

moving his friends to draw him safely out. Considering what a good-for-nothing fellow he was, it was wonderful to see how many friends he had: nearly every one that knew him loved him.

At length, as the morning dawned, Captain Maleenovsky fell asleep. He had drunk too much the night before, more than he would have done with any man but Lieutenant Alexeyev. When he awoke in the morning, he started up with a splitting headache: throat parched, tongue dry and furred; in a bad humour, too; cross and fractious. The first thought that came to him was a thought of Frederick Randal; and he was ready to vent his spite on the first living creature that came within his reach. Unluckily that was Vanka, his *valet de chambre*; and, as Vanka was his serf, and wholly in his master's power, poor fellow, he was likely to have a hard time of it that morning. Don't run away with the idea that Captain Maleenovsky was hard-hearted or tyrannical. Indeed, he was deemed a kind and generous master. But he had his faults; and, as an honest historian, I am bound to paint the bad in him as well as the good. Besides, the trick of avenging one's

wrongs by proxy is by no means uncommon in this strange, disjointed world of ours. In Russia, at all events, it takes place every day. Colonel rates one of his captains; captain avenges himself on one of his privates; private vents his spite on the first *moojeck* he meets in the street; and *moojeck*, having no one else to impart the favour to, goes home and flogs his wife. And so the poor scapegoat of a wife, the convenient "beast of burden," gets a mauling because a colonel whom she never saw spoke an angry word to a captain whom she never heard of in her life. So goes the world, my masters! Moreover, we are not to judge of a man's character by any one deed we see him do. There may be a stray sour apple on the best of apple-trees. In forming our judgment of a man, we must strike the average of his deeds. There is many a good man who sometimes looks uncommonly like a bad one.

There was every likelihood that poor Vanka would suffer that morning, because a certain Englishman, whom he had never seen or heard of, had chosen to insult his master the morning before. Vanka was the scapegoat to be sent forth into the wilderness to bear the sins

of Frederick Randal. Scapegoat was in the ante-room, busily preparing the breakfast, and utterly unconscious of his fate, when his master fiercely pulled the bell-rope at the head of his bed, and, before a moment had passed, gave it another fierce tug, which wrenched it off, and brought it down on his own head. At that moment Vanka entered the room, downcast and anxious. Did poor scapegoat guess what was coming?

“Thou loitering rascal!” exclaimed Captain Maleenovsky; “why art thou never within call?”

“I was in the ante-room, your honour,” answered Vanka; “and I came as soon as I heard the bell.”

The scapegoat knew now what kind of a lot awaited him that morning. But what could he do? He was bound to submit; he was Captain Maleenovsky’s serf.

“How often must I tell thee never to answer me again?” cried scapegoat’s master, angrily.

“But your honour asked me a question.”

“There it is again!”

And Captain Maleenovsky gave Vanka a smart cut on the face with the bell-rope.

“But, your honour——”

“I’ll teach thee to be saucy, thou scoundrel! Dost thou hear?” Silence. “Why dost thou not answer me? We have turned sulky, have we?” Another cut with the bell-rope. “Answer me, I tell thee!”

Another cut.

“I don’t know what to do!” cried poor Vanka. “Your honour gives such contradictory orders! Which am I to obey?”

“I give thee contradictory orders! How darest thou say so, thou villain?”

And the blows came thick and fast on poor Vanka’s head.

“Please, your honour——”

“Hold thy tongue!” Silence. “Now dress me, Vanka.”

Scapegoat brought out his master’s clothes, and laid them on a chair.

“Shall I dress your honour in bed?”

“No, I will get up. But how is this? This shirt is dirty: I have worn it before.”

He meant to visit Helen Cameron again that morning on an interesting errand. Of course, poor scapegoat could not divine his purpose. O Helen, is this the man thou art going to choose for thy husband? Think well

before thou takest the step, or some day thou mayest be turned into a scapegoat !

“Only yesterday,” said Vanka.

“Only yesterday ! How often am I to tell thee that I must have a clean shirt every day ?”

And Captain Maleenovsky pinched and twisted scapegoat's ear, till poor scapegoat squeaked with pain. Ah, why didn't he turn him out into the wilderness ? Pinching and twisting of the ear are unknown arts there !

“Please your honour,” pleaded scapegoat, “it was only yesterday morning your honour told me that this shirt would do for two days.”

Ah, then, yesterday morning honour had not made up his mind to visit Helen Cameron two days running ? What had occurred to change his mind ? Oh, that interview (for the first time without witnesses) in “the loveliest spot in St. Petersburg !” The same thing which had made Helen's face radiant, had evidently made Captain Maleenovsky resolve to put on a clean shirt.

How long this scene might have lasted there was no knowing, had not Lieutenant Alexeyev at that moment entered the room.

Good-for-nothing fellow as he was, to his honour be it said that he never gave in to the Russian habit of cruelty to the lower classes.

“Hallo!” he said: “what’s all this row about?”

“The rascal was giving me a dirty shirt.”

“That all?” exclaimed Alexeyev, laughing: “last time I slept here, I remember you pinched his ear for giving you a clean shirt when you thought the dirty one would do. Tables turned, it seems; laws of the establishment changed, I suppose.”

And Lieutenant Alexeyev laughed heartily. He seemed altogether brisker and more lively than the evening before. The night’s rest had refreshed him more than Captain Maleenovsky, I fancy.

“The fellow has no taste or judgment at all,” said the captain.

He spoke almost in an apologetic tone. Who knows? Perhaps he was already beginning to regret the wrong he had done. Tables turned between him and his friend. Amusing to see them change places: Alexeyev the reprover, and Maleenovsky the apologist! Whether he were ashamed of himself, or

simply did not wish the subject broached in scapegoat's presence, he ordered Vanka to get the breakfast ready, and finished dressing himself. Vanka cast a look—oh, such a look!—of thankfulness on Lieutenant Alexeyev as he went away. No wonder one class of persons, at least, loved the gay, good-for-nothing young scapegrace so much!

“A wonderful way you have hit upon for teaching taste and judgment!” said Alexeyev. “Every punch on the head sending an idea into the brain, every twist of the ear embodying the lines and curves of beauty, every stripe on the face revealing harmony of colours! If I were a rich man, I would found a professorship of the new art at the University of Petersburg; and I would appoint you the first professor of the chair, providing plenty of subjects to operate upon for all time.”

“But Vanka is, at times, so perverse!”

“My dear fellow, is he to exercise the right of private judgment at all? If so, make some allowance for mistakes, and don't treat them as crimes; if not, better at once draw up a stiff code of laws and regulations for every minute of the day and for every shirt in the wardrobe.”

“Well, old boy, let us go to breakfast.”

At breakfast, the two friends discussed a plan, which the wealthier had struck out during the night, for delivering the needier from all his embarrassments. By - and - by, Vanka brought in the letters which had come by the post. Captain Maleenovsky hastily snatched up one packet, and was soon buried in its contents. It was clear that they interested him deeply. For a Russian, he was a very undemonstrative man. He could have borne almost any amount of pain without showing that he felt. A strength of will about him, too, which would have enabled him to master the pain, to endure the boot with almost as much firmness as Ephraim Macbriar. Still, Lieutenant Alexeyev, who was quick-sighted in the affairs of others, could see that the letter touched him to the quick. He could not mistake that knitting of the brow and clenching of the teeth.

“What is it all about, dear old fellow?” he asked, with a little derangement of his usual nonchalance. “Lost a pretty girl, or offended your superiors, or had ill-luck in betting—eh?”

“Why should I hide it from an old friend

like you?" said Captain Maleenovsky, looking up from the paper: "this despatch is to tell me that I have lost my suit in the district court at Groozeeno."

"What! Lawsuit about Doobeenovka?"

"Yes."

Doobeenovka was the name of Captain Maleenovsky's estate in the Government of Novgorod. All the property he had in the world!

"Poor old fellow! Lost all your property, then? As bare-skinned as myself now? No wonder you look glum over it!"

"That does not follow," answered Captain Maleenovsky. "My steward tells me that he has lodged an appeal in the provincial court of Novgorod."

"And what do you mean to do?"

"I don't see that I can do anything. My steward has a good head for such things; in fact, knows far more about law proceedings than I do; and I must wait patiently till the provincial court pronounces its judgment."

"Take my advice for once, old fellow!" said Lieutenant Alexeyev, almost earnestly for him. "You've given me lots of advice—gratis; valuable, though wasted, and there-

fore useless, advice : let me pay in the same coin, and we'll be quits. Take a fool's advice : *be on the spot yourself*. Matter of life and death to you : don't trust to others ; but look into everything yourself. That precious steward of yours ! Never liked the cut of his phiz."

"You always had a prejudice against poor Pankratitch. My sainted father had always the greatest confidence in him."

"Prejudice or no prejudice, don't like the man. Look at things with my own eyes, not with my father's. Stands to reason. There is that about Pankratitch——"

"We shan't agree on this point : so we had better not discuss it," said Captain Maleenovsky.

"Be it so, old fellow ! A f—hem !—a wise man will have his way. Still, I say, best be on the spot yourself. Could call on the judges, and lay your case before them."

"There is sense in what you say. I'll go."

The very fact, that a high-minded man like Captain Maleenovsky was not shocked by his friend's proposal, goes far to show the difference at that time between Russia and England as regards the administration of justice. In

England, not a man in his senses would have dreamt of laying a private statement of his case before the judges who were to try it in public. In Russia, not a man in his senses would have dreamt of refusing to do so. The highest-minded man would have thought it fair to avail himself of every means by which he might get substantial justice done.

"Know the judges?" asked Alexeyev.

"One of them: Mr. Popovitch."

"Hah! the honest one: the one that is fool enough not to take bribes, and so starves on his paltry salary. Look of the man enough: arms out at elbows, and legs peeping through rents in pantaloons. Better know the dishonest ones: honest one will do you justice whether you know him or not—makes no difference."

"Do you know the others?"

"Know them all, old fellow. Will give you letters of introduction to the other two."

"How did you get to know them?"

"Imperial Highness had a case in the court. Some paper, old fellow: may as well write off the letters at once."

While Alexeyev was writing, Malecenovsky remained in deep thought. It was sad to think of parting with Doobeenovka, his birth-

place, the home of his childhood, the tenderest memory of his riper years! And then the "souls" there, with whom he had formed kindly ties, to whom he stood in the position of owner and master! Ah, had he done his duty by them? Would they regret him, should he lose the lawsuit? Had he given them cause to regret him? The thought saddened him and softened him: softened him to Vanka among the rest; softened him especially to Vanka as a present living type of all the rest. He thought of what he had done in the morning. Would Vanka be sorry to part with him? Would not late scapegoat rejoice to be rid of a fitful and wayward master? Captain Maleenovsky was ashamed of what he had done; and when he felt he had done wrong, he had the manliness to acknowledge it. He rang the bell. Late scapegoat entered the room.

"Vanka," said his master, in a kind and gentle tone, "when didst thou hear from home last?"

Late scapegoat looked at late tormentor puzzled and surprised. What was the meaning of the change which had come over master? Late scapegoat's philosophy not deep enough to solve the problem.

"Last week," he answered quietly, without puzzling his brain any further about the difficult problem.

"And were thy mother and brothers well?"

"Yes, your honour."

"Wouldst thou like to see them all again?"

"Wouldn't I!"

And a ray of gladness lighted up late scapegoat's dull and downcast face.

"If I can get leave, I mean to go myself: if I do, thou shalt go with me."

"Hurrah!" cried Vanka.

And, utterly forgetful of the presence in which he stood, late scapegoat took such a leap as his Hebrew prototype might have taken when bounding into the wilderness.

"And, Vanka," continued Captain Maleenovsky earnestly, "forgive me the wrong I did thee this morning. Vasseely Igoritch was right: thou wast not to blame; and I struck thee without a cause."

Lieutenant Alexeyev's eyes had wandered from his writing: he was gazing on this scene with a look which belied his cynical philosophy. Vanka's exultation had vanished in a moment. His master had struck the right chord in his heart. His eyes filled with

tears: he fell on his knees before Captain Maleenovsky, grasped his hand, and covered it with kisses.

“Oh, baarin, baarin” (master), he cried: “that you should speak so to the likes of me!”

Lieutenant Alexeyev, too, jumped up, seized his friend's hand, and cried out, with an earnestness of which he had hitherto seemed incapable:

“I say, old fellow, you are a brick!”

As soon as he had finished writing his letters, Alexeyev went away; and Captain Maleenovsky was left alone with his thoughts. Those thoughts might have shaped themselves into these words: “Farewell to Helen Cameron, if I lose this suit! Her purse-proud father will never consent to a beggar for a son-in-law. It is well that I have gone no further in this matter. I was strongly tempted yesterday morning to fall down at her feet and offer her my heart and my hand. I am glad I didn't. She clearly likes me already; and I would not for the world disquiet her mind. How lucky that the despatch came when it did! If I had gone to see her this morning, I should certainly have committed myself. I must keep away from her now till this affair is

settled. Happily I have not committed myself yet. I wonder if she guesses that I love her. I think not: I have been too cold and polite for that. Farewell, Helen Cameron, for the present!"

In the midst of all the uncertainty which hung over the future, one thing seemed clear: that the success of the lovesuit would rest on the success of the lawsuit. From the cold words which I have put into Captain Maleenovsky's mouth, you may fancy that he did not care much for the success of the lovesuit at least. If you do, you do him wrong. He was not one to put strong feelings into words. His aim, in any case, would have been to lock them up within, far out of sight and hearing. He was not one to shilly-shally about a course which he saw was wise: he had a strong iron will, which could carry out a plan in spite of such things as feelings and wishes. So thorough was his mastery over himself, that even his friend Alexeyev, if he had been still in the room, would not have had the slightest idea of the struggle which was going on within, of the anguish which was entering as iron into his soul. Captain Maleenovsky was not the man to undervalue wealth: he had

lived too luxuriously for that. But, at this moment, he felt that he would gladly lose all his wealth, if he could only gain Helen Cameron for his one treasure on earth. But no: she, too, must go with the rest; ay, go *because* the rest went.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAWSUIT.

“ *Duke . . . My business in the state
Made me a looker-on here in Vienna,
Where I have seen corruption boil and bubble,
Till it o’errun the stew. . . .*”

SHAKSPERE: *Measure for Measure.*

THE estate of Doobeenovka had formerly belonged to the Ilinskys. The grandfather of the present prince, though wealthy, had lived beyond his means. To free himself from debt, he had been forced to sell slices off his estates. Captain Maleenovsky’s great-grandfather, a successful merchant of Kazan, who had made a large fortune in the Siberian fur trade, had bought Doobeenovka from the wasteful prince, and settled down there as a country gentleman. The title-deed was placed in a strong box in the handsome house which he built on the estate.

But, since that time, the Ilinskys had retrieved their losses ; and the family policy had become to re-absorb all the slices of land which had been cut off in the family’s time of need. All the land surrounding the estate of the

Maleenovskys had fallen into the hands of the Ilinskys; and Doobeenovka stood like an oasis in the desert, or an island in a sea, which all belonged to Prince Ilinsky. It was a dreadful eyesore to the powerful family; an everlasting memorial of their past misfortunes and disgraces. The present Prince Ilinsky had offered to buy it; but General Maleenovsky, our captain's father, did not care to part with his patrimony.

Such was the state of affairs when General Maleenovsky was startled by the news that Prince Ilinsky had brought a lawsuit against him in the district court, claiming Doobeenovka as a part of his ancestral estates. His first impulse was to run to the strong box and scan the title-deed, to see on what flaw the prince could found his claim. To his dismay, he found that the title-deed was gone! He was an absent man; and it was thought that in one of his fits of forgetfulness he had left it on his library table, and that some spy of Prince Ilinsky had snatched it away. He did his best to make up for his loss. He signed an affidavit, and got some of his neighbours to sign others, bearing witness to the existence of the title-deed, as well as to the fact that for

many years Doobeenovka had belonged to the Maleenovskys. Armed with these weapons, he was preparing to carry on the war in the district court, when he suddenly died, bequeathing to his son, not only the unhappy estate, but the dangerous lawsuit with which it was encumbered.

Captain Maleenovsky followed Alexeyev's advice, and, easily getting leave of absence, went to Novgorod to look after the affair himself. Public opinion was strongly in his favour; but the case was to be tried by three gentlemen who were moved by something higher—or lower—than public opinion. He therefore set to work to move the judges. Mr. Popovitch, "the honest one," saw the justice of his cause, and set him at his ease. The second judge listened favourably to his case, till he learnt that the great Prince Ilinsky was the plaintiff, and then bluntly told Maleenovsky that he had not a leg to stand upon. But the third judge, Mr. Kokoshkin, reassured him.

Mr. Kokoshkin lived in one of the largest houses in the most fashionable part of the town, and in luxury and pomp seemed to vie with the highest nobles about Novgorod.

Where he found the money for all no one knew; but at least many guessed. He was not a man of property when he became a judge; and the paltry salary of his office would not have covered a tenth part of his yearly expenditure. To many envious eyes, all that magnificence was but a symbol of—BRIBERY. He was dressed in the highest fashion, in the costliest superfine cloth. Gold chains and rings, and jewellery of all kinds wearable by gentlemen, made his outward appearance quite dazzling. Moreover he was studiously polite and cordial.

As soon as Captain Maleenovsky entered his library, the great man rose, shook hands warmly with his guest, and, handing him a chair, begged him to sit down. Wines and refreshments were brought in; and nothing would do but “his precious guest” must partake of his hospitality. Captain Maleenovsky thought worthy judge one of the kindest and pleasantest gentlemen he had ever met in all his life. He felt quite at home, and talked as if he were speaking to an old friend. Mr. Kokoshkin, on his part, talked too. Any friend of his worthy friend, Lieutenant Alexeyev, would always be heartily welcome.

Forget him? How was it possible to forget? Such a word as "forget" must be blotted out of his (worthy judge's) vocabulary, sooner than it should be applied to so worthy a gentleman as Lieutenant Alexeyev. Such a handsome young man! Such an entertaining companion! And how was his worthy friend? And how was that worthy friend's great patron and protector, his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Nikolay Pavlovitch? He (worthy judge) was proud to remember that he had been of some service to Imperial Highness in a former case; and, if he could only be of any help to a friend of Imperial Highness's *protegé*, he need not say how proud he should be. If only he could have that honour and that satisfaction!

Captain Maleenovsky found it a hard task to lead worthy judge from small talk like this to the merits of his case. Mr. Kokoshkin seemed to have plenty of time on his hands. At length, worthy judge condescended to listen to the lawsuit, and seemed to listen attentively, reading the affidavits with the greatest care.

"A very interesting case," he said at last: "very interesting." He seemed to look on

the case with the same fondness with which a surgeon regards a difficult operation. "Of course, the absence of the title-deed makes it doubtful; but, if there is evidence to prove the existence of the title-deed, that can be remedied. It is one of those cases, about which honest men may differ in opinion; and those are just the cases which are most interesting to a true lawyer's mind. Of course, those cases are the most costly too: you will understand why." (In bribes, your high-honour?) "Well, it is unfortunate that you should have such a powerful antagonist as his Highness Prince Ilinsky; but then a gentleman who has his Imperial Highness the Grand Duke Nikolay Pavlovitch at his back——"

"Your high-honour," said Captain Maleevsky honestly, "I would not leave a false impression on your mind. I wish you to understand that his Imperial Highness knows nothing of this case, and will not interfere with it in any way."

"Ah, that is a pity," answered Mr. Kokoshkin: "it is such an interesting case. Still we shall see what can be done." Worthy judge suddenly finds out that he had other more important and perhaps more "interesting"

work to do. So he added: "I am sorry to inform you that I can spare you no more time at present; but I will introduce you to my secretary, who can direct you as well as myself what steps to take."

"I am much obliged to your high-honour."

In obedience to Mr. Kokoshkin's summons, his secretary entered the room; and worthy judge formally introduced him to Captain Maleenovsky amidst a shower of flourishes and bows. The secretary looked like a miniature likeness of his master. He clearly aped the judge in manner as well as in dress; and his courtesy and seeming heartiness were something really wonderful for a stranger. He took Captain Maleenovsky to the first *restaurant* at Novgorod, and there ordered the costliest supper for two, and the best wines which the cellar of the establishment could supply. Maleenovsky wondered at such liberality till the bill came, when he found that—he had to pay the whole himself.

When the secretary began to "instruct" him, Captain Maleenovsky found that he had more to pay than he had ever dreamt of. Everything was a great deal dearer than when his steward had managed the case. When he

mentioned this remarkable fact to the secretary, his new friend laughed, and said that of course he must expect everything to be dearer in a city like Novgorod than in a small district town. What with affidavits and fees of one kind or another, his money was slipping through his fingers as fast as if the light-fingered gentry had taken him in hand. There was only one thing to comfort him. His friend, the secretary, assured him that his case was in a fair way to settlement, and that there could be no doubt about the result. Captain Maleenovsky thought so too. He was sure that Mr. Popovitch would vote in his favour; and now, happily, he had also secured Mr. Kokoshkin's good-will. Costly; but soon over, and well over!

He spent several weeks in dancing attendance on the worthy secretary. Somehow, at the end of those weeks, his lawsuit seemed no nearer settlement than at the beginning. Worthy secretary kept assuring him every day that it was "in a fair way;" but, unhappily, the "way" seemed to have no "end." During those weeks, worthy secretary dined, and in fact lived, at Maleenovsky's cost, feeding on the daintiest fare, and drinking the costliest

wines. After a while, too, he began to borrow small sums of money, which somehow became bigger and bigger every time he borrowed, till the gallant captain began to doubt whether he could raise enough of the "sinews of war" to carry him through the lingering campaign. Truly a lawsuit was an expensive luxury!

One day, when his money was nearly exhausted, worthy secretary came to him in tears, and declared that he was in the direst distress. He was in debt to the tune of five thousand roubles; and, unless the amount could be raised at once, he would be ruined for life. Could not gallant captain help him? Gallant captain declared that there was no plaister in that quarter for worthy secretary's wound. All his ready money was gone: in viands and wines, affidavits and fees, and other costly articles! But could he not raise some more? Not unless he went home. Well, then, would gallant captain oblige worthy secretary by going home and raising the money? Gallant captain *would* go home and see what he could do. The fact was, he wanted to consult a friend and neighbour, before he took another step.

CHAPTER XII.

THE END OF THE LAWSUIT.

“ A Sergeant of the Lawe, ware and wise,
That had often yben at the paruis,
There was also, ful riche of excellence :
Discreet he was, and of grete reverence ;
He seemed swiche, his wordes were so wise.”

CHAUCER: *Canterbury Tales*.

WHEN he arrived at Doobeenovka, his friend strongly advised him not to advance the loan. Friend more likely than victim to see that worthy secretary had merely been plucking gallant captain. Malcenovsky followed the advice; and the next two or three days he spent at Doobeenovka, thinking chiefly of the pending lawsuit. What would be the issue? If he could but foresee it! But he would know it soon enough in the course of nature. No need to forestall events!

Yes, soon enough; for, on the fourth day, the post brought him a packet from Novgorod. He was sure that it contained news of his lawsuit; and he took it into the library, or private cabinet, to peruse it at leisure. He had strong nerves, as well as a strong will:

still his hand trembled a little as he broke the seal of the packet. And, as he read the paper within, his lips quivered. The lawsuit had been decided—against him! Even the forebodings of the past few days could not prevent the news from coming upon him with a shock of surprise. He had so thoroughly trusted worthy secretary and his master, that for a long time he could scarcely realise the fact. But, as he dwelt upon it, and began to take it in, all that it implied dawned upon his mind. He had lost his lawsuit twice: was he likely to win it the third time? Would not the same motives, which had governed the district court and the provincial court, have weight with the senate also? And then? Farewell to Helen Cameron! As he thought of this, Captain Maleenovsky buried his face in his hands.

Long he sat thus; but, at length, a new train of thoughts passed through his brain. Must he part with Doobeenovka? The place was endeared to him by a thousand memories. There he had been born. There his childhood had been spent. He could scarcely call up any memory of his mother which was not linked with Doobeenovka. There his father

had died. As he thought of all this, he went up to the window, which commanded the finest view of the whole estate. The house was built on the brow of a hill, and looked on one of the richest valleys that could be seen in that part of Russia: the Maleenovskys had brought all the latest improvements to bear on their estate; and the outcome was, that the broad domain of Doobeenovka was as richly cultivated as any estate in Russia. Far as Captain Maleenovsky could look, all the land he saw was his own. And must it pass away into other hands? Not without a struggle, though!

Ay, but what use in struggling? Senators governed by the same motive as other judges; would pronounce the same judgment. In Russia might rode rough-shod over right. But then a wild thought shot through his brain. There was one exception: the secret police! Like all true and honest men in Russia, Captain Maleenovsky revered Count Golovin, Chief of the Secret Police, though he had never seen him at the time. We have seen that he knew Mr. Tolstoy, who was one of Count Golovin's most trusted underlings; and he had heard enough of the count from his friend, to feel that he was making the secret

police a blessing instead of a curse. If the worst came to the worst; if he lost his case in the Senate;—might he not appeal to Count Golovin. If any man in Russia were likely to see justice done, he was that man. It would be hard to overrate the comfort which the thought brought with it.

As he was thinking thus, Vanka came and told him that a gentleman wished to speak to him. Who was the gentleman? Vanka did not know: a stranger. Let the gentleman know that gallant captain could not see him; was too busy, and altogether too much out of sorts. In a few minutes Vanka returned. Gentleman *must* see gallant captain; would not leave till he *had* seen him. Business of utmost importance. Half in weariness and half in anger, Captain Maleenovsky told Vanka to show the gentleman into the library, and prepared to receive him in no very pleasant frame of mind. In another minute the gentleman came in. A tall, handsome gentleman, who moved and walked with an air which seemed to stamp him a Somebody.

“I fear you will think this an unwarrantable intrusion,” he said coolly, smiling as he spoke.

"To tell you the truth, I do," answered Maleenovsky, rather tartly.

He stood haughtily, as if bidding the stranger defiance. Mr. Somebody laughed out, tickled by a frankness so uncommon in society.

"Let me assure you, sir," he hastened to say, "that I honour you for your outspoken truthfulness."

"How your compliment is to make up for your intrusion, I don't understand," rejoined Maleenovsky.

And yet there was something in the stranger which interested him in spite of himself.

"I hope you will change your opinion before I leave the room," continued the stranger, with perfect self-possession; "and, as I am tired with my walk, I will take the liberty of sitting down."

And he coolly took a seat.

"Confound the fellow's impudence!" muttered the gallant captain.

But the stranger spoke so politely, and was clearly such a thorough gentleman, in spite of his "impudence," that Maleenovsky could not think of turning him out.

"I hope you will use no ceremony," said Mr. Somebody, smiling pleasantly, "but make

yourself at home, and sit down when you feel tired."

Captain Maleenovsky burst out laughing: the idea of a perfect stranger, whose very name he did not know, asking him to make himself at home in his own house, struck him as the absurdest thing he had heard for a long time. He sat down, and answered:

"You seem to feel at home enough for two."

"I generally do, wherever I am," was the cool reply.

"And yet I do not even know your name!" said Maleenovsky.

"You need not remain long without the knowledge: I am known here as Alexander Izmailov; and, for your better guidance, I may tell you in the strictest confidence that I am an agent of the secret police."

The name of the secret police brought a crowd of thoughts into Captain Maleenovsky's mind. Strange, very strange! He had been thinking of the secret police when this member of the force entered. He had almost made up his mind to appeal to their chief for redress. He was therefore not unready to trust an agent of the secret police. And now the thought struck him: why not take Mr.

Izmailov into his counsels? He was in a sore strait, perplexed and bewildered; and surely the All-wise had sent him a counsellor in his need. Mr. Izmailov, as an agent of the secret police, must be acquainted with lawsuits, and could, at any rate, give him disinterested advice.

So he gave him an account of the lawsuit, and put copies of all the affidavits into his hands. He next told him of his adventures at Novgorod. When he spoke of his dealings with Mr. Kokoshkin and his worthy secretary, Mr. Izmailov laughed heartily.

“Do you think my refusing to lend money has decided the case against me?” asked Maleenovsky.

“I cannot say; but I rather think not. I imagine the loan was merely the last drop of juice they meant to suck out of the orange before they threw it away.”

“They!” exclaimed Captain Maleenovsky; “but Mr. Kokoshkin himself had nothing to do with it.”

Mr. Izmailov burst out laughing.

“And are you really so—hem!—charitable as to believe that the secretary did all this without his master’s knowledge?” he cried. “Of course Mr. Kokoshkin had his full share

of every kopeck that found its way into his secretary's pockets."

"But what of the dinners, and the suppers, and the wines?" asked Maleenovsky: "Mr. Kokoshkin could not share *them*!"

"No; but he could deduct their worth in money from the secretary's salary.

"Wheugh!"

"A cheap way of boarding one's secretary, you know."

"But do you really believe, sir, that Mr. Kokoshkin meant all along to fleece me, and then leave me to my fate?"

"No, I don't. I think that, at first, he thought it might be good policy to take your part; but, as soon as you so honestly acknowledged that you had nothing to hope for from the Grand Duke Nicholas, I have no doubt he made up his mind to get his pickings out of you through his secretary."

"What a frightful picture you are drawing of the administration of justice!"

"Bless you! they have drawn it mildly this time: they have done far worse things in their day."

"And yet they are allowed to remain, and turn law and justice into a farce!"

“Never you fear! Justice shall overtake them in good time, or my name is not—Izmailov. Give them rope enough, and they’ll hang themselves.”

“But have I no redress against these scoundrels?” asked Maleenovsky.

“None whatever.”

And Mr. Izmailov laughed uproariously. Captain Maleenovsky was rather nettled, and said warmly:

“I think it is a shame!”

“You see, you ran into the net with your eyes open. The wise man said, ‘Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird.’ But you acted as if you came into the world with a mission to prove that the wise man was a fool.”

“But do you mean to say, sir, that there is no redress against such barefaced corruption?”

“Certainly not,” answered Mr. Izmailov, again laughing heartily, to Maleenovsky’s annoyance. “You paid some exorbitant fees; you ordered a lot of useless affidavits, not worth the paper on which they were written; you feasted your interesting friend right royally, and, out of your own bountiful nature, advanced him sundry sums of money in the

shape of loans. That is all!" And again Mr. Izmailov laughed uproariously.

Captain Maleenovsky winced again. He did not relish that laugh; he could not see the joke at all.

"Could I not at least get the loans back?" he asked, after a pause.

"Certainly, if you have a receipt for them," answered Mr. Izmailov, laughing more merrily than ever.

"I am sorry to say I have not."

"Then you are done for! They have done the job neatly. Ah, they are clever rascals."

Captain Maleenovsky felt the chaffing more keenly than a wise man ought to have done, and, to turn the conversation away from his own past folly, asked:

"Do you think I should appeal to the Senate?"

"Decidedly," answered Mr. Izmailov, becoming serious at last. "I believe there are men of honour in the Senate; and, though there are others who will be influenced by Prince Ilinsky's rank and wealth, still there is a chance of your winning the case."

"And if the Senate should confirm the decisions of the district court and the provincial court?"

Captain Maleenovsky looked Mr. Izmailov full in the face as he asked the question, anxious to find out from his look as well as words what he really thought of the matter. He fancied that the agent of the secret police grew bigger as he gazed at him. At any rate, without any fancy, he could detect a conscious pride in Mr. Izmailov's mien and tone, as he answered :

“ You have heard tell of Count Golovin, the head of our force ? ”

“ Heard of him ? Who has not ? *Insigne mætis præsidium reis*—the—— ”

“ And so forth. Just so. Well, if you fail in the Senate, appeal to his highness, Count Golovin ; and, if he is in office at the time, he will see justice done. ”

The very words fixed themselves on the young officer's memory.

After some further conversation, Mr. Izmailov took his leave.

CHAPTER XIII.

RACHEL RANDAL.

“A woman is a dish for the gods, if the devil dress her not.”

SHAKSPERE: *Antony and Cleopatra*.

FREDERICK RANDAL usually wore his heart upon his sleeve. Not a comfortable lodging, one would think, for so tender a thing; exposed to the cold gaze of the world like a sergeant's stripes. But when one has not strength to keep it down in its right place, what is one to do? You may be sure that it was not from choice he bared his heart: if he could have had his way, he would have tucked it in and kept it warm in the cosiest corner of his inner regions. But he could not help himself: his heart got the better of *him*. His feelings were always on the fizz; and, though he often tried to cork them down, every now and then pop would go the cork, and out would fly the feelings, regardless of his will, and trot themselves out before his wondering fellow-creatures.

But, *in re* Helen Cameron, Fred was making a grand, I may say a heroic, effort to prevent

the seat of his feelings from exhibiting itself sergeant-fashion to an admiring world. Not content with corking them down, he tried to secure the cork with a double wire. And he really did succeed to a great extent. Who knows? Perhaps the blow he had received had already done him good, and developed in him a strength unknown before. But we mortals seldom do any one thing from any one motive. We are creatures of mixed motives. So I rather think that Randal's vanity came to the help of his will, and counselled him to be dumb. He had often enough boasted of his power over "the belle of St. Petersburg;" and he could not bear that any one should think that she had jilted him. It would have been more agreeable to his feelings to win the fame of jilting her. But if he had succeeded in deceiving the whole world beside, there was one person whom he could not have deceived. However tight he might have fastened down the cork, there was one insinuating corkscrew that could always draw it out at will—his sister Rachel.

Rachel Randal was two or three years older than Helen. Not quite so beautiful; still, handsome and attractive in her way.

Indeed, until Helen "came out," she had enjoyed the proud title of the "belle" of the English society at St. Petersburg. One great drawback, though, on her beauty; a certain pinched and wizened look, painful to see in one so young. Her enemies called her "sour." Rachel retorted by calling them "wicked;" and alleged that what the wicked called "sour" the righteous called "serious." Two years before the time of our story, Rachel had paid a long visit to her relations in England, and had come home a changed girl. Her English friends belonged to the Low Church: and her own account of the change was that she had been "converted;" which phrase the wicked paraphrased by saying that she had "turned sour." True it is, that she had once been the gayest of the gay, and was now serious: which meant, said the wicked uncharitably, that the rising sun of Helen Cameron had drawn away the worshippers from Rachel Randal.

There was a time when she and Helen had been bosom friends; but that, the wicked again uncharitably remarked, was "before Helen Cameron's beauty had blown into such splendour as to eclipse Rachel Randal's." On

her return from England, Rachel had earnestly tried to bring Helen to her own way of thinking, and, having utterly failed, had cooled towards her, and shut her out of her fellowship. Thenceforth Helen Cameron was "light" and "frivolous;" which, said the wicked, meant "cheerful" and "beautiful." Many beside the wicked thought that Rachel need not have been quite so hard upon the ill-trained, motherless beauty. But Rachel Randal almost always went to extremes. A fact which was further illustrated by her promoting Jenny Cameron, Helen's cousin, to Helen's vacant place. Jenny was a sweet quiet little girl: one of those devout women we sometimes meet with, whose religion is a second (or first) nature; not a change so much as a growth, beginning from childhood, and ripening up to old age. In her "worldly days," Rachel had been wont to look down upon poor Jenny: first, because her father was only a clerk in the house of Cameron and Son; and, secondly, because Jenny herself was a "Methodist," as Rachel then called her.

You will readily believe that Rachel did not deserve all the reproaches which were

hurled against her. "Give a dog a bad name and hang him;" and Rachel Randal had not a good name in the fashionable society of St. Petersburg. But, in spite of faults, she was really a good sort of girl at bottom. I do not mean to say that what she called "worldly motives" did not sometimes mingle even with her seemingly religious deeds. Which of us can say that about ourselves? But, in the main, she was sincere, earnest, and unweariedly zealous. The worst of it was, that her zeal was often "zeal without knowledge." Wisdom did not govern all her movements. Many of her religious views were narrow and unreasonable; and, the narrower and more unreasonable they were, the more dogmatic she was in asserting that they were the truth, and the only truth. Feeling intensely right herself, she thought all who differed from her wrong; and she believed herself sent into the world on a mission to set them right. She really meant to do good, and did it too; but, from want of a large wisdom, the good was strangely interwoven with evil. Of course she earned the name of "Busybody" among the wicked; but, to give her her due, she did not care what names she

got, or what ill-will she earned, at the hands of the wicked, so long as she gained the good opinion of the righteous.

Of course, her brother did not escape her pious surveillance. After his last interview with Helen, so unsatisfactory as it was, he had naturally become rather sad. Rachel looked on this sadness with joy. She thought that he was becoming "serious;" that "the good seed," which she had sown, was beginning to take root in his heart. She watched over him with a mother's jealous watchfulness. No hen could brood over her eggs more carefully than she tried to hatch the young life which she thought was forming within. She longed to "help on the good work;" and therefore she probed his heart with a not unskilful hand. Frederick long withstood her intermeddling. He drew the wire tighter over the cork. But insinuating corkscrew had already wormed itself in; and, before Randal was aware of it, pop went the cork, and out flew the feelings.

When Rachel found out that what she had thought "the love of good things" was merely "the love of Helen Cameron" wounded and spurned, she was bitterly disappointed. But

by-and-by she began to take her brother's view of the matter, and to believe that he had been encouraged and jilted. And then her righteous indignation broke forth. Ever since her return from England, she had steadfastly set her face against her brother's growing attentions to Helen Cameron: and this is surely answer enough to those who charged her with being jealous of Helen; for, if she had been, would she not have gladly saddled Helen with the only young man who could not marry herself? But she said that "Freddy ought to have a more serious wife than Helen;" and she had done her best to persuade her brother to write the name of Jenny for that of Helen Cameron on his heart. But, when she found reason to believe that this thoughtless "reprobate," so unworthy of her brother, had not only spurned but jilted him, her righteous indignation knew no bounds.

At first, it vented itself in torrents of bitter reproach. But words soon lost their power to express her strong feelings. Could she not carve them into deeds? Ay, but how to act wisely in the matter? This said power of "acting wisely" was not one of Rachel's strong points. Was she aware of it? Did

she at least dimly guess it in this one case? And was that why she made up her mind to take Jenny into her counsels? Whatever the cause, she did speak to Jenny about it one morning when her friend called; and so, the feelings which Frederick Randal had been so busily and so heroically corking down, were likely after all to be published to the world, and the unlucky heart worn sergeant-fashion once more. Jenny Cameron (a very pretty girl, small and delicate, but thoughtful, and far from being small in soul) heard Rachel out quietly, and then said in a sweet musical voice :

“But, Rachel, dear, remember you have heard only one side of the story as yet.”

“Do you think Freddy would tell a falsehood?” exclaimed Rachel indignantly.

“By no means, dear,” answered Jenny, in a quiet tone, which was a pleasant contrast to Rachel’s sharp and somewhat shrill voice : “but you know that we are all apt to take a one-sided view of anything that affects ourselves.”

“No one can be fairer than Freddy,” cried Rachel.

“I think it due to Helen to hear both sides before condemning her.”

“You must confess, Jenny, that she is frivolous and coquettish; the very girl to do such a thing.”

“I think you are too hard upon her, Rachel, dear,” answered Jenny, with a quiet dignity, which was very striking in so small a creature: “she has not the same views as you and I have on many things; but she has deep feelings, and is capable of noble deeds.”

“Deep feelings! A giddy, giggling flirt! Capable of noble deeds? Why, she does not know what ‘a sense of duty’ means.”

“Rachel, dear, you are unjust,” said Jenny, aroused out of her usual quiet demeanour. “If I were you, I would call upon her, and hear her version of the story, before I heaped such abuse upon her.”

Rachel Randal reflected for a moment. After all, she was a righteous girl, and did not mean to be unjust. Only she took a one-sided view of the affair; and, when her feelings were strongly roused, she could not cork them in any more than her brother. After a long pause, in which she seemed to shake herself up and take herself to task, she answered, rather more quietly:

“You are right, Jenny: I *will* see her, and

hear what she has to say for herself; and, if she can't defend herself, why, then, I'll give her a bit of my mind."

Jenny understood what that "bit of her mind" meant: it was a sharp sort of mind at the best of times, and was not likely to be softened when exercised on such a "sinner" as Helen Cameron. She therefore said:

"Only don't take for granted, to start with, that Helen is guilty; and, Rachel, dear, don't tell her to defend herself, as if you had a right to question her."

"And have I not a right?" exclaimed Rachel, roused up again to her former high pitch of tone: "is Helen Cameron to jilt my brother without my having the right to ask her why?"

Jenny was almost sorry that she had suggested the interview. She saw clearly how it was likely to end; and, like a true peacemaker, she was anxious to prevent mischief.

"There now!" she said; "you are still taking for granted that she is guilty."

"Leave me to deal with her," answered Rachel: "I warrant you I'll wring a confession out of her."

"Rachel, dear, that is not the right spirit

to undertake the work in. A judge should be unbiassed, and not talk about wringing a confession out of the prisoner at the bar."

"I know that she is hard-hearted and proud," continued Rachel; "but she can't be so brazen-faced as to deny that she encouraged Freddy at first, and then threw him off when this conceited young Russian captain came in the way. I should hope she had some lingering sparks of conscience left."

"Don't you see, Rachel, that you are all along prejudging the case? I see no use in your going to Helen at all in that spirit; you will only misjudge whatever she may say."

"Ah, if Freddy had only taken my advice, and turned his thoughts elsewhere!" exclaimed Rachel.

"Rachel, dear, you know you are giving me pain," said Jenny, with an appealing glance.

"But you know, darling, that you love him," answered Rachel, throwing her arm round her friend's slender waist. "Why, Jenny, dear, you have confessed as much to me."

Jenny did not blush: her eyes, indeed, sought the ground; but her voice was as firm and calm as ever when she spoke again.

"I have told you that I liked him," she said; "but I never told you that I loved him. And, supposing I did love him, what would be the use of it so long as he loves another?"

Rachel kissed her friend tenderly: ah, there were some warm human feelings in that heart, too!

"But he will learn to love you: I know he likes you very much already."

"Not a word more," answered Jenny. "You have no idea how distasteful it is to me."

No more was said on that point; and, soon after, Jenny took her leave.

The following morning, Rachel Randal went to administer castigation to Helen Cameron. I will not go so far as to say that a sense of injury did not mingle with her motives. But certainly she had a notion of doing Helen "good." The coquette was wrong: Rachel's mission in the world was to set the wrong right; and she was but accomplishing the end of her being in lashing the motherless girl. Helen Cameron was a sinner, and a great sinner too; and, if Rachel Randal could but reclaim that erring sister, one more good deed would be done in the world.

Helen was sitting with Miss Meldrum in the cosy breakfast-room, reading Shakspeare, when Rachel entered. The girl with a mission looked unusually big and solemn: the mission cast its shadow over her. Helen was certainly taken by surprise: because Rachel had not come to see her for many months; and it was understood that the friendship between them was broken off for ever. When Natalia first announced Rachel's name, strange thoughts, unlikely things, passed through Helen's brain. Had Rachel relented? Had she seen the error of her ways? Had she repented the harshness with which she had treated her former friend? The first glance at Rachel's face was enough to put all such thoughts to flight. The mission was written in her eyes.

Rachel, on her part, did not know how to begin. She was usually fluent enough. Did conscience smite her as to some of the steps she had taken, and some of the words she had uttered? Whatever the cause, after a few commonplaces had been uttered, there was a long and awkward pause. Rachel made more than one attempt to break it: it clearly devolved on her, as the girl with a mission, to lead the talk. But the missionary spirit

seemed suddenly to have forsaken her. The mission itself was in danger of being left in the cold. At last, in her despair, she snatched a book from the table, as if she hoped to find inspiration there : and surely inspiration might have come from that book, if from any ; for it was a volume of Shakspeare that she had unwittingly picked up. But, if she received any inspiration from it, it was the inspiration of disgust ; for she suddenly dropped the book on the table, as if her fingers had been soiled.

“ Oh, Miss Meldrum,” she said, “ I am so sorry to see that book here. Do you allow Helen to read it ? ”

“ Allow ? ” cried Helen.

She had hitherto looked on in an amused sort of way, which irritated Rachel. But now she tossed up her head, and showed how much her features could express.

“ Certainly,” said Miss Meldrum, in answer to Rachel’s question, bristling up on finding her own department invaded : “ why not ? ”

“ Why, it is a play-book.”

“ What do you mean by a play-book ? ”

“ A collection of dramas.”

“ Of course, I know—that Shakspeare is a

play-book—in that sense ; and why should not Helen—read a play-book ?”

Rachel, with all her zeal, was taken aback.

“Don’t you think that the Bible condemns play-books ?” she asked.

“It would be strange—if it did—as there is—at least one drama—in the Bible itself.”

“Oh, Miss Meldrum, you quite shock me !”

“Not a very hard thing to do,” said Helen quietly.

“What is the Book of Job—but a sublime drama—with a prologue and an epilogue ?”

“But the Book of Job is a religious book,” answered Rachel, beginning to feel bewildered.

“And why should not Shakspeare—be a religious book ?”

“Oh, Miss Meldrum, it is quite frightful to hear you talk like that !” cried Rachel : “why everybody knows that Shakspeare was one of the most immoral writers that ever lived.”

“Ay, there are some—fools who think so ; but did you ever—read him yourself ?”

“No-o !” exclaimed Rachel.

She pronounced the little word with startling energy, as if she had packed into it the concentrated essence of horror. The impression she made was akin to that produced

by her dropping the book itself on the table.

"Then you don't know what a treat is in store for you," remarked Helen, laughing quietly.

"I should be sorry to read Shakspeare."

"Then how can you judge?"

"But surely it is not necessary to wade through all kinds of filth, before you can pronounce that it is filth."

"But how can you say that it *is* filth without seeing it?" asked Helen, feeling amused.

Rachel was put into a corner. Knowing nothing of the subject, she was clearly out of the lists.

"But surely you cannot deny that flirting and flightiness of all kinds are learnt by reading Shakspeare," she said.

"I do deny it," answered Miss Meldrum.

Rachel lifted her eyes and hands, and was dumb. What could she say after that? There was another long and awkward pause. But presently she saw an opening out of the bog. Here was a grand opportunity for beginning her attack on Helen, and so discharging her mission! Had she not truly received inspiration from Shakspeare?

"I see now where Helen has learnt to flirt with young men," she said, in her sourest manner.

Miss Meldrum was up in arms in a moment: she never could see Helen attacked without coming to the rescue. Helen herself was calm, and amused rather than otherwise.

"What do you mean?" asked Miss Meldrum.

"Never mind what she means," answered Helen. "Rachel has her head so high up in the clouds, that she never can see quite clearly what is going on down below."

"Can you deny that you encouraged Fred's addresses up to the time that this conceited young Russian captain of yours made his appearance, and then jilted him without pity?"

Poor Helen herself was rather sore on the subject of Captain Maleenovsky. He had visited her for a time, and led her to believe that he loved her; and then he had suddenly disappeared, and left no trace behind. She was strongly tempted to retort sharply; but she checked herself in time.

"I do not recognise your right to question me, Rachel," she answered with quiet dignity.

"What! You are to abuse my brother,

and yet think that I have no right to ask you why !”

“None whatever,” answered Helen. “Fred is not a baby, and can speak to me himself. In fact, he *has* spoken ; and I have given him all the answer I mean to give any one.”

“Oh, Helen, you are hardening your heart against the truth. Your conscience tells you that you have done wrong ; and, therefore, you dare not defend yourself. But you hope to brazen it out before the world with a show of innocence. That is not the way to peace of mind. You have sinned against God and against my brother ; and you must repent your great wickedness, and ask forgiveness of God and of man.”

Helen listened to this tirade with a patience which astonished Rachel as well as Miss Meldrum. They both knew her high spirit, and expected her to fly into a rage. Instead of that, she quietly answered :

“I have told you, Rachel, that I do not recognise your right to take me to task.”

“Take my word for it, Helen, if you go on like this, you will bring your father’s grey hairs with sorrow to the grave,” continued Rachel.

“Papa has not got a grey hair on his head,” answered Helen demurely, looking quite innocently at Rachel: “his hair is light brown.”

Miss Meldrum burst out laughing. Even Rachel felt her gravity upset. She saw that she was wasting breath in trying to reason with the “light” and “frivolous reprobate;” and she soon afterwards departed from the house, (metaphorically) shaking off the dust of her feet.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PARSON-POWER.

“A good man ther was of religioun
That was a pore Persoun of a toun.

* * * * *

But it wer any person obstinat,
What so he wer of high or low estat,
Him wold he snybben sharply for the nonce.”

CHAUCER: *Canterbury Tales*.

THOUGH Rachel Randal had sustained a check, she did not throw up the game in despair. Like a prudent general, she fell back on her Reserve. She had what she believed to be an unfailing resource, not merely in a Higher Unseen Power, though in that too she was a devout believer, but also in a lower human power. She had in reserve a redoubtable champion, whom she delighted at all times to call out to fight her battles with the wicked, when her own skill was foiled. When beaten, she fell back upon the parson-power.

I believe that most women are hero-worshippers. But women of the stamp of Rachel Randal naturally look for their hero in the clerical line. Rachel had found her hero: the Reverend Ebenezer Birkenshaw was the man.

Now pray don't misunderstand me: by hero I do not mean a lover. Such worldly thoughts had not as yet entered Rachel's brain: that is to say, since she had "turned sour," as the wicked termed it. Moreover, the Reverend Ebenezer Birkenshaw was by no means an interesting young parson, but a plain middle-aged man, with a wife and family; and I think the most enthusiastic devotee would have found it rather hard to carve a lover out of him. But he was her pastor, and as such became her hero.

Mr. Randal's family belonged to the Church of England, and went to the Chapel of the British Embassy at St. Petersburg. But Rachel Randal, on her return from England, had expressed herself dissatisfied with the Reverend Reginald Herbert, the chaplain to the Embassy. She admitted that he was a scholar and a gentleman; but she declared that he was not a "converted man." He was seen at balls and assemblies: he could see no harm in a rubber of whist: and, worst of all, she said, "he did not preach the Gospel." He was altogether "a worldly man." She was most unhappy, and came home from the chapel Sunday after Sunday, declaring that she was

the worse rather than the better for going. It was "borne in upon her mind" that she ought to be "faithful with her minister;" and I believe the first "mission" she ever undertook was to the Reverend Reginald Herbert. Unhappily, she could not cope with him in learning or in argument; and he met all her serious warnings in such a good-humoured, bantering style, that she drew back discomfited.

At that time a somewhat remarkable man was making some noise in St. Petersburg. The Reverend Ebenezer Birkenshaw had lately "settled" there as pastor of the Congregational Church, and was at once acknowledged to be a power, not only in his own church, but throughout the English community. What was the secret of his power? Not a spark of genius in the man. Not a great preacher: indeed, greater out of the pulpit than in it; because, in the pulpit, the few striking things he said were so drowned in floods of commonplaces, that their force was diluted and lost. Not a man of high culture: barring a smattering of Greek and Latin, he knew no language but his own. But a man of great natural force of character: his personality telling upon most of those who came into contact with him;

exactly the same out of the pulpit as in it. Can you fancy a man at a party saying to you the same things as he does every Sunday? You would be startled. Above all, a man intensely in earnest. Religion had, at that time, in a great measure, become a matter of form among men around him. Here was a man once more in God's world who felt that religion was an everlasting reality. He felt the power of it himself; and it came out of him, and told upon all around him. He was narrow in many of his views: his zeal often outran his wisdom; and he sometimes even made himself a laughing-stock by the mistakes into which he fell. But there was no mistaking the power of God in the man; and, in spite of all his faults, men revered him as a genuine man.

Rachel had often heard of him from her friend Jenny Cameron. There was no Presbyterian Church at St. Petersburg; and the Camerons, as Presbyterians, had joined the Congregationalists. So it happened that Jenny, as well as Helen, had the Reverend Ebenezer Birkenshaw for a pastor. Rachel was tempted, one Sunday morning, to go to the Congregational Church; or, rather, to the Moravian

Church, which was then kindly lent to the Congregationalists for their morning service. She had gone to spy the land: but the first words which Mr. Birkenshaw uttered threw a spell over her spirit; and the whole sermon, which followed, thrilled her through and through. The intense earnestness of the man enthralled her. Here, at length, was a man after her own heart. She went to the Chapel of the Embassy no more. Soon she joined the Congregational Church, and became, I was almost going to say, Mr. Birkenshaw's right-hand man. On the other hand, no one worshipped Mr. Birkenshaw more than Rachel. He was her oracle, her hero, her god on earth. I believe no Roman Catholic priest ever acquired greater power over a female devotee than the Reverend Ebenezer Birkenshaw acquired over Rachel Randal.

When, therefore, she was baffled in her charitable assault on Helen Cameron, it was natural that she should resort to her trusty champion for help. He was Helen's pastor, as well as her own; and he might be able to subdue her proud heart. It was Saturday morning; and the minister was most likely preparing for the morrow. But it was well

known that he was accessible to his flock at all times. So she went to Mr. Birkenshaw's at once. As she had expected, he was "busy in his study." A quaint-looking man, very simple and very old-fashioned. A big bony man, with a stooping gait, an awkward clumsy figure, and ungainly movements. But his face made up for all defects of person. Not a handsome face; indeed, rather a plain one. Not an intellectual face; indeed, rather heavy and dull. But an intensely earnest face. A face, out of which honesty seemed to beam forth. A face, on which you might read the inscription: "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up."

Busy as he was, he luckily was not in one of his absent moods, when it was hard to catch his attention; and, as soon as Rachel entered the room, he laid aside the pen with which he had been writing, and, begging her to sit down, prepared to listen to her. Rachel Randal was always welcome there. Mr. Birkenshaw knew her worth. I fancy he would rather have lost any man in his church than that female lieutenant of his. It was through such zealous natures as hers that his power told most on the neighbourhood.

"Well, my dear young friend," he said, as

soon as the usual greetings were over; "and what can I do for you?"

Rachel mentioned her anxiety about Helen Cameron, and stated her own view of the way in which her brother had been treated. Then she added:

"I fear she is in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity."

"We must not judge too hastily, Rachel," answered Mr. Birkenshaw, in a deep clear voice. "Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things."

"I have tried to exercise charity," said Rachel; "but, after all, truth is greater than charity."

"Even 'the truth' we are to 'speak in love,' my dear. I have seen more of life than you; and I have found sparks of grace in characters the least promising."

"I wish I could detect even one spark in Helen Cameron," said Rachel sharply.

"Miss Cameron is doubtless light and thoughtless: but she is still young; and the good work often needs a long time to bring it to maturity."

Rachel thought that she herself was still young; and, yet, that "the good work" had

come to a tolerable state of ripeness in her. Still, she had too much reverence for her pastor to set up her own judgment against his. She therefore meekly answered :

“ I may have been too hasty ; and I hope you will find that I am mistaken.”

“ But why do you not speak to her yourself, Rachel ?” asked Mr. Birkenshaw. “ I have heard you say that you were once intimate with her ; and I know no young person who can present the truth more forcibly than you.”

This was high praise, coming from Mr. Birkenshaw : a plain man, too simple and truthful to be a flatterer. Rachel felt the praise, and blushed. She told her pastor of the interview she had just had with Helen. As she spoke, a sad expression settled on Mr. Birkenshaw’s quaint face : an eager, yearning, pitying look. Was not Helen Cameron one of the lambs of his flock ? And was she not going astray ? Rachel added :

“ You must take her in hand yourself, sir.”

“ This is indeed sad news !” exclaimed Mr. Birkenshaw, with a deep sigh : “ I had no idea that there could be so much stubbornness and pride in that lovely-looking creature.”

Was there a slight cloud on Rachel’s own

not unlovely face? Would she have preferred the epithet "lovely-looking creature" to the high praise she had just received? Surely not! Why the cloud, then? She could think of nothing more suitable for a reply than the saying:

" 'Handsome is that handsome does.' "

"You are right, Rachel," answered Mr. Birkenshaw, with another sigh. "We are indeed easily led astray by a lovely face: whether it be that, losing sight of the true beauty, we crave the mere outward semblance of it; or whether it be that the great enemy of souls makes use of the outward semblance to lead us away from the inward reality. How sad that so much outward beauty should cover a heart so deformed! I must indeed take her in hand."

"Can you see her this morning, sir?"

"Yes, Rachel: I will go at once, and see if I can't touch her proud heart."

"Thank you, sir."

And Mr. Birkenshaw rose, and went straight to Mr. Cameron's house.

Helen was still at her studies with Miss Meldrum in the breakfast-room when the minister came in. Both the ladies welcomed

him heartily. After a few words of greeting had been exchanged, Mr. Birkenshaw suddenly and abruptly asked,

“Are you converted, Miss Cameron?”

Mr. Birkenshaw often abruptly asked the same question, even in mixed companies. There was such a stamp of earnestness about the man, that no one could for a moment think that he was canting. That power in him, of which I have spoken, often sent the question home even to the hearts of the most thoughtless. I have met more than one man who ascribed all that was best in him to some pointed question which the Reverend Ebenezer Birkenshaw had once asked. But, while in this way he did much good, he also did some harm. His questions sometimes awoke only ludicrous associations.

This was the case with Helen; she burst out laughing. She could not help it, poor girl! The question jarred so much against the trains of thought which had been passing lately through her mind, that it had the effect of wit upon her. She did not wish to be rude; but she could not for the life of her have kept in the laugh.

“For shame, Helen!” said Miss Meldrum.

But, for all that, she had been on the very point of laughing herself: nothing but the habit of politeness joined with great self-mastery could have checked her. To Mr. Birkenshaw Helen's laughter was but a confirmation of Rachel's suspicion that she was "in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity." He sighed for her, and said with much quiet dignity, and in a gentle tone:

"I am but a humble servant of my Master, Miss Cameron; and it matters little to me how much I am laughed at or scorned. But for your own soul's good, I would have you remember, what you seem to have forgotten, that, humble as I am, and poor in this world's goods, I am an ambassador of the King of kings."

Helen was touched and sobered in a moment.

"I humbly beg your pardon, Mr. Birkenshaw," she said sweetly.

Mr. Birkenshaw was touched in his turn: it was hard to withstand Helen in her gentler moods.

"Well, that is something," he answered.

"I can assure you," continued Helen, "and I think Miss Meldrum will confirm what I say, that nothing could be farther from my thoughts than to laugh at you or your office."

"I am sure of that," said Miss Meldrum.

"But the fact is," Helen went on to say, "your words, coming so abruptly, fell on a previous train of thought in my mind, and were so incongruous with it, that they upset my gravity."

Mr. Birkenshaw could scarcely withstand the sweetness and winning grace with which Helen had made her apology; and yet he felt it his duty to rebuke the light and trifling spirit which had gone before. So he answered gravely, and even severely:

"No thoughts ought to be indulged which would be out of harmony with the most solemn truths."

"But do you disapprove—all light conversation?" asked Miss Meldrum; "all thoughts that would—make one laugh?"

"I humbly try to copy my Master," answered Mr. Birkenshaw gravely: "I read that 'Jesus wept;' but I nowhere read that 'Jesus laughed.' And indeed, Miss Meldrum, this world of ours is too full of sorrow and of sin for me to wish to laugh."

"But, Mr. Birkenshaw," said Helen, looking rather arch and wicked again, "we read

that Jesus went to a wedding-feast; and do you think he looked glum all the time?"

Mr. Birkenshaw was too honest not to admit the force of an argument which he felt, even when it told against himself, or to slur it over with plausible sophistries. He felt the difficulty which Helen had started; and he paused for a moment to think how it could be met, or whether it could be met at all. At length he answered:

"It is not for me to say how He conducted himself at the wedding-feast: the word of God says nothing about it; and it becomes us not to be wise above that which is written. But, to me, a wedding seems a solemn thing. When I think of the issues which are involved; when I remember that it is a union which will make or mar the happiness of two immortal souls;—I do not feel inclined to laugh at a wedding. I differ from your Church in many things, Miss Meldrum; but I agree with it when it says that matrimony 'is not by any to be enterprised, nor taken in hand unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly,' but 'reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God.'"

"With all due deference—to your superior

wisdom—allow me to suggest—that these words apply—to the act of choosing—and not to the wedding-feast,” said Miss Meldrum.

She spoke timidly and nervously: what right had she, an old maid, to pronounce an opinion on the subject?

“Decidedly,” remarked Helen.

“But, Mr. Birkenshaw,” continued Miss Meldrum, “is not the power of laughing—given us by God? And would He have given us the power—if He had meant us not to use it?”

“The power of sinning is given us by God; and do you infer that He meant us to sin?”

“I see a vast difference between the two cases,” answered Miss Meldrum promptly: “laughter is the simple exertion—but sin is the perversion—of a natural power.”

But this discussion had no interest for Helen. She wished to put a stop to it, and therefore said, with a sweetness and grace which won Mr. Birkenshaw’s heart:

“You have not told me, Mr. Birkenshaw, if you have forgiven my rudeness.”

“She is not so bad, after all,” thought the pastor, and then added aloud: “I forgive you

heartily, my child ; and I thank God for giving you the grace to acknowledge your fault."

Miss Meldrum had been accustomed to the dignified manners of the clergymen of the old school ; and Mr. Birkenshaw's abrupt address to Helen had offended her taste as well as tickled her risible faculties : moreover, she could not bear any one to blame Helen but herself.

"I don't think, sir—it was altogether Helen's fault," she said somewhat tartly : "I myself must confess—that I found it hard work—to keep from laughing."

"I am grieved to hear it," answered Mr. Birkenshaw, looking very serious.

"With all due deference—to your superior wisdom—I humbly think, sir—that such solemn questions—so abruptly put—are likely to do harm," continued Miss Meldrum.

I think dear, good Miss Meldrum, with all her large-heartedness, was not sorry to find such a capital chance of having a fling at a Dissenting minister. Mr. Birkenshaw did not bristle up or feel his dignity hurt, but answered meekly, in a tone which made Miss Meldrum feel rather queer :

" ' Let the righteous smite me ; it shall be a

kindness : and let him reprove me ; it shall be as an excellent oil, which shall not break my head.' Ay, my dear madam, I should willingly defer to your opinion, if I had not a higher authority to guide me ; but an inspired Apostle directs me to be 'instant in season and out of season.' "

"But, surely, by 'out of season'—the Apostle does not mean—that we should speak at an unsuitable time—or in an unsuitable way."

"When I remember that immortal souls are at all times perishing, I can think no time and no way unsuitable to bring them to the truth."

"Yes, Mr. Birkenshaw—but surely your aim is—to save those immortal souls—and not to sink them deeper—into the mire. If what you say—is said at such a time—and in such a way—as to make a bad impression—that is not the way—to do them good. For example, if what you say—strikes them as ludicrous—and makes them laugh—as it did Helen just now—and me too very nearly—surely that is not the way—to save immortal souls."

"I am not responsible for the way in which people receive the truth," answered Mr. Bir-

kenshaw. "I clear my conscience by uttering the truth : their blood be on their own heads."

"I beg your pardon, sir ; but that strikes me—as a cold and selfish way—of looking at the matter. You do not care—what becomes of them—so long as you yourself—go scot free !"

"Oh, Miss Meldrum, you surely do not doubt my intense anxiety on their behalf ?"

"No, I do not, Mr. Birkenshaw ; and I think you did not—do yourself justice—in what you said just now. With all due deference—to your superior wisdom—I think that you *are* responsible—for the impressions you make on others. You are bound to present the truth—in the way that is best fitted—to carry it home to men's minds ; and if you utter it in a way—which is sure to make them laugh—you, and you alone—are responsible for the laughter."

I fancy Mr. Birkenshaw had never received such a lecture before, since he had become a minister ; and to think that the meek, quiet, nervous old maid should have given it him ! He looked thoughtful and grave. Well, Miss Meldrum had given him some food for reflection. He was too honest not to acknowledge

that there might be truth in what she said. So absorbed was he in the new train of thought which she had aroused, that he forgot all about the errand on which he came ; and, soon after, he took his leave, *re infecta*. But perhaps he would yet “discharge his conscience,” as Helen might find to her cost.

CHAPTER XV.

FEARS AND HOPES.

“O thou that dost inhabit in my breast,
Leave not the mansion so long tenantless,
Lest, growing ruinous, the building fall,
And leave no memory of what it was.”

SHAKSPERE: *Two Gentlemen of Verona.*

THE following morning Helen awoke with a sense of wretchedness, to which she had been an utter stranger till of late. It was a beautiful Sunday morning in early summer; and all nature seemed to smile and be glad. But nothing could relieve a dreary feeling of forsakenness which had for some time been weighing heavier each day. There was one who made all the world to her now; and he was not there. Strange the hold which Captain Maleenovsky had taken of that maiden heart in a few weeks! He had come, seen, and conquered, all at once. The maiden fortress, which one young man or another had been vainly besieging for years, had freely opened its gates, surrendered without a summons, and laid its key at the conquering hero's feet. His Byron's hero-look had no doubt done a good deal, but that was not all:

her heart had been taken captive, as well as her imagination.

To a girl of Helen's free, open, and impulsive temperament, untrained by a mother's care, and unwarned by experience, it was hard to place any check upon her love. Indeed, she knew not why she should. Was not that love her glory and her life? Why be ashamed of it? Why not indulge it to the full? "Unmaidenly?" Yes, as girls are trained to think; but in a state of nature, as Helen in a great measure was? I hear you, madam: "Captain Maleenovsky has not spoken to her of love!" True. But had there not been passages of love notwithstanding? Pressures of the hand? Soul shining out of eyes? Heart speaking to heart? Was she not quite sure that he loved her? Would she have been more sure if tongue had confirmed the language of hand and eye? And why not return his love? "She should have waited till he spoke?" True; oh, most true! Better for her if she had. Unmaidenly be it then: I will not quarrel with the word. But I wish you to fasten your thought upon the fact, that she felt she loved Captain Maleenovsky with all her heart and soul.

And, yet, since that memorable day, when Frederick Randal insulted him, she had not seen him or heard of him. What did it mean? She knew nothing of his lawsuit, or his absence from St. Petersburg; and, as a matter of fact, Captain Maleenovsky had long since returned to the city. Could Randal's insult have driven him away? Surely she had said and done enough to show that *she* did not sanction it! Surely she had punished the wrong-doer severely enough! Moreover, Captain Maleenovsky himself had seemed unmoved by the insult. What *could* it mean, then? Helen was sorely perplexed. For a time, her strong new-born love had buoyed her up, and enabled her to bear his absence with cheerful courage. But, as time wore on, and still he did not appear, she began to feel unhappy. Had she been deceived? Oh, heavens! Was his seeming love a mere outward show? And, now that months had passed without the slightest token from the absent one, her sense of loneliness and wretchedness became well-nigh unbearable.

The feeling had become so oppressive this morning, that she had not the heart to get up or to dress. She loitered over the task till

the breakfast hour was passed. When she went down to the breakfast-room, she found her father and Miss Meldrum already there, and busy over their morning meal. She kissed them both in silence, and sat down. On a Sunday morning, Mr. Cameron, having no letters to read at breakfast, always seemed out of his element. This morning, however, he had taken down a heavy (literally and figuratively heavy) book of theology, and seemed absorbed in its contents. Without looking up from the book, he said, rather sharply for him :

“You are late this morning, Helen.”

“Yes, papa : I overslept myself.”

True ; but not the whole truth, you know. Thoughts as much answerable as sleep for her late appearance. But what could she do ? You see, she could not exactly say : “Yes, papa, I have been mooning ; thinking about Captain Maleenovsky.” Something in Helen’s tone of voice touched a tender chord in Mr. Cameron’s heart, and made him look up.

“Why, bless you, my child !” he cried, with a sudden pang : “what’s the matter with you ? You are looking very ill. Don’t you think she looks very ill, Miss Meldrum ?”

"Yes, sir: Helen has not looked very well lately," answered Miss Meldrum anxiously.

In spite of the dread in which he sometimes stood of his daughter, he was passionately fond of her, as we have seen. Though he often said, and sometimes felt, that she was "the plague of his life," still, if the slightest touch of sickness upset her, she at once became "the joy of his life." And no wonder: she was his only treasure. He rose from his seat, and went up to his daughter. He gazed on her lovely features with an enraptured look, till his own face became quite beautiful, as if it had been a mirror to reflect hers.

"Why, this is not our Helen," he said tenderly: "Helen Cameron, 'the belle of St. Petersburg.'"

"Indeed, she is changed, sir."

"This must be seen to."

"I think we ought to go—to the country," said Miss Meldrum. "Petersburg begins to be—unhealthy at this time of the year."

"I must speak to Dr. Hunt about her," continued Mr. Cameron uneasily.

"I think a voyage to England would do me good, papa," said Helen wearily, gazing into

her father's eyes in a dreamy sort of way: "I should like to see the dear old fatherland for once."

"And so you shall, my darling," answered Mr. Cameron heartily, imprinting a warm kiss on her soft rosy lips.

"Oh, you darling papa!" cried Helen, bursting into tears: "you are the dearest, kindest, tenderest papa that ever lived."

"What have I to live for but you, my child?"

Helen had risen, and thrown her arms round his neck; and he took her into his own, and folded her tenderly to his heart.

"I am going to the Chapel of the Embassy to-day," Miss Meldrum suddenly announced.

Miss Meldrum, as a staunch Churchwoman, had stipulated, on entering Mr. Cameron's household, that she should have the right to go to her own church whenever she chose. Of late, she had seldom availed herself of her right; because she was a large-hearted woman, and thoroughly appreciated the earnestness of the Reverend Ebenezer Birkenshaw. But the right, though in abeyance, was always in reserve; and I fancy she had come a little too close to the Dissenting minister the day before.

Helen longed to go with her to the Chapel of the Embassy. She had always felt more at home among the richer and more fashionable company that worshipped there. In her present state of mind, too, she shrank from Rachel Randal's gaze. Rachel had a seat close to the pew in which Mr. Cameron's family sat, and at right angles with it, so that they could look straight into each other's faces. Helen had defied Rachel bravely enough the day before ; but she did not feel quite so cheerful or so strong to-day. Altogether, she shrank from going to the Moravian Church. But she knew her father was wretched when she was not with him there ; and, with her heart so freshly drawn toward him, she resolved to sacrifice her own comfort to his.

The English service at the Moravian Church began half an hour later than that at the Chapel of the Embassy ; and so Mr. Cameron's carriage had just time to set Miss Meldrum down at the Embassy, and then return for Helen and himself. This morning it returned some minutes later than usual. Mr. Cameron became very fidgety. He was a punctual man ; kept his appointments to the very minute. But, above all, he hated to be late at

church; maintaining (old-fashioned in his views, you see) that we had no right to treat God with less respect than man.

When they reached the church, the service had begun; and they had to walk before the whole congregation to reach their pew, which was by the side of the pulpit, at the other end of the church. It was such an unusual thing for Mr. Cameron to be late, that most eyes were turned upon them as they walked along. They looked a queer couple; looked as if they scarcely belonged to each other. Helen nearly half a foot taller than her father: something, too, in Mr. Cameron's air and manner, which seemed to widen the distance between them. He was proud of his daughter; but he also seemed conscious that she threw him into the shade. He had a queer look about him, which said: "How came I to have such a magnificent creature?" Certainly a remarkable contrast between the handsome beauty and the plain, honest little man!

As Helen walked up the aisle, running the gauntlet before the whole congregation, and saw eyes peering at her over the high old-fashioned pews, she could not help fancying that all those familiar eyes wore a stern look.

At first, she wondered what it all meant. But suddenly it flashed across her mind that Rachel Randal must have been "giving them a bit of her mind" about Helen Cameron. Rachel was the very person to do it: she was always so active and busy with her tongue; and Saturday was her very day for visiting the members of the church. With her mind so full of the wrong which her brother had received, she could not very well have held her tongue; and, if all those eyes had taken in her one-sided view of the affair, no wonder they looked stern. It was enough to make poor Helen uneasy. An uncomfortable thing to be the observed of all observers, even when the observation is a friendly one. But when it is unfriendly? Helen was proud enough and brave enough to defy public opinion when she had done right. But when she had done wrong? Poor thing, she could not help feeling uncomfortable. To add to her annoyance, as soon as she seated herself in the pew, she saw that Frederick Randal was with his sister. She fancied that she saw a smile of triumph on his face, as if he exulted in her humiliation. Whether all this were real or fancied, the effect was the same: she was distraught,

and could not join in the worship. It was not till the sermon began that she was able to abstract herself from her surroundings.

Mr. Birkenshaw said a few striking things; but, as usual, they were so drowned in floods of common-place, that it needed a close attention to catch them. But owing partly to the thrilling tones of his deep voice, and partly to the moving power of his earnestness, even his common-places came with the force of freshness on his flock. Toward the close of his sermon, he rose to something like eloquence. He analysed the wiles of the heart so skilfully, and tracked them so mercilessly, as with a bloodhound's instinct, to their lurking-places, that he probed many a heart among his hearers, and forced it to say: "It is I!" And he ended with such a striking picture of a man, at the end of a long life, finding that he had been deceiving himself all along; that he had been something far other, something far blacker, than he had thought;—that many a one devoutly joined in the last words which he uttered: "Search me, O God, and know my heart—try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

There were some pointed remarks in the sermon, which led one to think that he was aiming it at Helen Cameron ("discharging his conscience," I suppose); and, from the significant looks which from time to time were turned to the pew in which she sat, it was clear that many of his hearers thought so too. Happily Helen misunderstood the meaning of those looks: to her they were simply a prolonging of the glances she had met at her entrance. And, if Mr. Birkenshaw had really aimed at her, he missed his aim. He shot above her head. She was unused to that inlooking, which one needed to enter into his analysis. She could not follow his sermon. Through her eyelashes she every now and then cast a sidelong glance at Rachel's pew, without seeming to look. Fred was staring at her a good part of the time. But Rachel was absorbed in the sermon: meekly drinking in every word which Mr. Birkenshaw said; so spell-bound, that her lips were slightly parted, and her eyes fixed on the preacher with a stony stare. Helen soon ceased to listen, and surrendered herself up to her own thoughts, which, from whatever point of the compass they might start, always turned in time to the

one centre of her heart. Where was Captain Maleenovsky? What was he doing? What was the meaning of his long absence and his long silence? Had he really deceived her?

She was startled out of her reverie by the hymn which was sung at the end of the sermon. The service was soon over; and the people began to move. As she went out of the church, many friends, as usual, crowded round Mr. Cameron; but she could not help thinking that they looked coldly on her, and fought shy of her. Ah, Rachel Randal had done her work thoroughly!

Dr. Hunt belonged to the Congregational Church; but as he was not there that morning, Mr. Cameron proposed to drive on to his house, on the other side of the Summer Garden. At the gates they alighted, to walk through it. The Garden was thronged with men, women, and children, as it usually was on Sundays; but there were quiet nooks and corners, and shady alleys which were deserted. As they were walking through one of these, at a turn of the road, they stumbled on—Captain Maleenovsky!

The encounter was so sudden, that Helen had no time to think: on the impulse of the

moment, with a strong rush of feeling to her heart, she sprang forward, her lovely face glowing with delight, her large blue eyes beaming with joy, and, eagerly holding out her hand, told him in words as glowing as her face how glad she was to see him once more. Then, as suddenly becoming conscious of her over-eagerness, and all that it seemed to imply, she became confused, blushed up to her temples, and cast her eyes to the ground. All Petersburg, on that lovely summer Sunday, could not have furnished a picture more beautiful than that.

Mr. Cameron, being left in the background, had seen nothing of all this except the eager rushing forward. But Captain Maleenovsky saw it all, and understood all that it implied. He would have been either more or less than man, if he had not felt a wild thrill of joy. But a deep feeling of pain swallowed up the delight. Had he then, in spite of all his endeavours to undo what mischief he had done, awakened a strong love in Mdlle. Cameron's heart? He must crush it at once. He must, in some subtle and delicate way, convince her that henceforth they two could be nothing to each other. But how to do it? As far as he

was aware, he lacked the skill, but not the strength. True, it was like plucking out a right eye, or cutting off a right hand. Still, he had the courage and the strength of will needed for the task. He could coolly cut off his own chance of happiness to insure her future ease. But how to do it wisely?

Meanwhile, Mr. Cameron had stepped forward, shaken hands with him, and said in a friendly tone:

“Why, Captain, what has become of you all these months? We were really anxious about you.”

Did a sudden hope spring up in Captain Maleenovsky's heart? What meant that friendly tone?

“I did not know you cared enough for me to trouble yourselves about it,” he answered.

And he gazed at Mr. Cameron in a yearning sort of way, which was touching to see in so proud and strong a man. Alas, the sudden hope was as suddenly dashed by a change in Mr. Cameron's tone when he spoke again:

“When a gentleman suddenly strikes up a friendship with a family, is unwearied in his attentions for many weeks, and then as suddenly disappears, without giving any notice,

or saying so much as why or wherefore, and nothing is heard of him for months, it looks rather queer, you must confess."

"It never struck me so before," answered Captain Maleenovsky, with great politeness; "but as you put it in that light, I acknowledge that an apology is due to Mdlle. Cameron and yourself. As I have unintentionally given offence, I humbly beg your pardon."

"I should be glad to know what excuse you have to make for yourself," said Mr. Cameron.

It struck Captain Maleenovsky that the best apology he could make was one which would at the same time most thoroughly crush Helen's love: namely, to relate the facts of the case.

"The morning after I was last at your house," he said, "I learnt that a lawsuit, which I had in the Government of Novgorod, was decided against me in the district court. I was obliged to go that day to Novgorod, to carry on an appeal in the provincial court; and that accounts for my sudden disappearance. The appeal was decided against me: thereupon I lodged another appeal in the Senate; and I expect that the judgment will be pronounced to-morrow."

“Of course, there is no appeal from the Senate?” remarked Mr. Cameron.

“No, monsieur.”

“Do you anticipate a favourable decision?”

“From all I have heard, I fear the worst.”

“Does it involve a large amount?”

“My all, monsieur: my whole property.”

Captain Maleenovsky said this with a grim pathos which made poor Helen wince.

“Wheugh!” cried Mr. Cameron.

“If I lose the case, I shall be a beggar.”

Maleenovsky said this to deepen the impression on Helen’s mind; to make her see that there was no chance for him.

“I am sorry for you,” said Mr. Cameron; “but don’t forget that the loss of property is not the worst you could have had.”

“It involves other losses, monsieur.”

“In what way?”

“When I visited at your house, monsieur, I was a rich man. I could have said to the highest nobleman: ‘I can support your daughter in the style to which she has been accustomed—will you intrust her to me?’ And, now, where am I?”

“Why, all you have to do is to marry a poorer lady,” answered Mr. Cameron, laughing.

“Monsieur Cameron, you Englishmen ought to be the last to speak in that way,” answered Maleenovsky reproachfully: “would *you* thus lightly transfer your allegiance from one lady to another?”

Mr. Cameron winced: he *had* transferred his allegiance from Miss Agnes Randal to Helen’s mother. And what had he reaped? Of course, Captain Maleenovsky knew nothing of that early page in Mr. Cameron’s history: otherwise, he was too much of a gentleman to have asked the question.

“I beg your pardon,” said Mr. Cameron: “I did not know you had fixed your heart on any particular lady. But you must not be down-hearted: hope for the best.”

“I believe I am as little likely to be down-hearted as any man,” answered Captain Maleenovsky, with a touch of pride. “But, monsieur, I can’t help looking facts in the face. No use in ignoring facts: we must courageously accept them, and make the best of them.”

From time to time Maleenovsky had glanced at Helen, to mark the effect of his words. To his joy, he saw that she understood him. But, to his astonishment, he found that his an-

nouncement was anything but disheartening to her. Crush her love, indeed! Why, her love had blown into full size within the last few minutes. All uncertainty and doubt were gone. His mysterious behaviour was fully accounted for. He loved her, that was clear; and the only barrier between them was—money! The idea of money severing them! She knew better than that. Why, she would have money enough for both. She was her father's only child; and he was said to be worth a million. Who ever heard of two faithful loving hearts being sundered by gold?

“Why,” said Mr. Cameron, “many a poor man has married a rich man's daughter.”

“Honourably?”

There was something so significant in Captain Maleenovsky's tone, as he asked this question, that Mr. Cameron paused and looked at him before he answered. At length, he said:

“Why not?”

Captain Maleenovsky smiled and answered:

“You must excuse me for being somewhat sceptical; but we can bring the matter to a practical test at once.” Then he paused, as if scarcely liking to apply the practical test. “Forgive me for being personal,” he added.

“You are a rich man : would *you* consent to your daughter marrying a poor one ?”

Mr. Cameron was taken aback by this startling *ad hominem* argument ; and, to save his daughter, sacrificed his cause.

“No-o !” he cried emphatically : “never !”

“There, you see !” answered Captain Maleenovsky, laughing grimly : “when we come to the point, it is not so simple as you thought.”

But his heart was not laughing. That “no !” rang through it like a death-knell. Helen, on the other hand, kept her countenance, but was really laughing in her heart. The difference between them arose from the different estimates they made of a father’s authority. Captain Maleenovsky argued the question from the Russian stand-point ; Helen, from the English. In Russia, the bride was seldom consulted on the choice of a husband. The lover applied to her father and mother : and they settled the matter ; sometimes even without her knowledge ! The idea of marrying Helen Cameron without her father’s consent never entered Captain Maleenovsky’s brain. Helen, on the other hand, had the Anglo-Saxon ideas about freedom of choice. She loved her father dearly ; but she had no

notion of sacrificing her love to his will. Her father prevent her from marrying the man she loved ! Why, she always had her own way in everything. She would coax and wheedle him into giving his consent. It was all very well for him to say, " No ! " That " no " would in good time be turned into a " yes. " Not a doubt about it !

Nothing more was said on the subject ; and, soon afterwards, Captain Maleenovsky bade farewell to Mr. Cameron and his daughter. Helen looked back upon his retreating figure with new feelings and hopes ; with a joy at her heart, of which she fondly hoped that nothing could rob her henceforth. This was a crisis in her history. I think the Grub stage was drawing to an end. The power which could unfold the wings was clearly at work within her. For this was not a common worm of the dust, but a Grub ; with the possibilities of Butterfly-hood wrapped up in her nature. Possibilities, the measure of which the future was to reveal. It might be to soar to the higher regions of papilionic achievement. It might be to remain on the lower level of respectable Butterfly-hood. But clearly never more to grovel in the dust.

CHAPTER XVI.

TO HAVE, OR NOT TO HAVE.

“For thou hast been
As one, in suffering all, that suffers nothing;
A man, that fortune’s buffets and rewards
Has ta’en with equal thanks: and bless’d are those
Whose blood and judgment are so well commingled,
That they are not a pipe for fortune’s finger
To sound what stop she please. Give me that man
That is not passion’s slave; and I will wear him
In my heart’s core, ay, in my heart of heart,
As I do thee.”

SHAKSPERE: *Hamlet*.

CAPTAIN MALEENOVSKY had prosecuted his appeal in the Senate with characteristic energy. It was usual for suitors to canvass the senators, and ask for their votes; and, unless said senators were much belied, more money changed hands, during some of those trials, than members of parliament ever paid for the honour of sitting in the House of Commons. We are all, more or less, the creatures of public opinion: few of us ever rise far above the common level of thought and feeling around us. Captain Maleenovsky was undoubtedly a man above the common; and it was a striking token of the low state of public feeling in Russia, at that time, that

a high-minded man like him should have stooped to the use of low arts. He pestered his friends for letters of introduction to senators: to leading senators, if possible; but, if not, then "the smallest contributions" (meaning introductions to the smaller fry of senators) "thankfully received." He waited in private on all the senators whom he could catch, and clearly explained his case.

Having done all that he could to insure success, Captain Maleenovsky anxiously awaited the issue. The judgment of the Senate was to be announced on the day following that on which he had met Helen. He was at his lodgings, preparing to set off to the Senate, when his friend, Lieutenant Alexeyev, made his appearance. Rather surprised to see him at such a time, he asked:

"Well, and what ill-wind has blown you here this time, old boy?"

"An ill wind, indeed, that blows nobody any good," answered Lieutenant Alexeyev, laughing merrily. "Your confounded law-suit is a godsend to me, old fellow; because, you see, I hope it will initiate me into the sacred mysteries of the venerable Senate. Come to ask you a great favour. I have a

strong curiosity to gaze on the noble features of 'the collective wisdom' of our country: I suppose your precious lawsuit gives you the *entrée* of the Senate; and if you'll take me with you this morning, you'll lay me under an eternal obligation."

Lieutenant Alexeyev had determined to accompany his friend to the Senate that morning, and to support him, if need were, in the dreadful ordeal through which he might have to pass. He felt that he had never had a chance of really befriending Captain Maleenovsky, while the latter had been of the greatest service to himself. Maleenovsky knew him too well not to see through the flimsy pretext. The delicate way his friend had chosen of declaring that he meant to stand by him touched him to the quick; and he grasped Alexeyev's hand.

"I shall be delighted to have you with me to-day," he said.

And they walked on together toward the Senate-house.

"Can't stay long with you, old fellow, I am sorry to say: Imperial Highness helpless without me, and all that sort of thing," announced Lieutenant Alexeyev.

“Ah, Vassinka, a true friend, at such a time as this——”

“Bother sentiment !” exclaimed Alexeyev :
“sorry you can’t have a pipe.”

Smoking is not allowed in the streets of St. Petersburg.

“Never mind, old boy !” answered Maleenovsky : “enough for me to know what you are.”

As they walked along, Lieutenant Alexeyev adopted a strange method of “supporting” his friend under his trial. He made fun of the trial itself ; exhibiting it under various ludicrous aspects. At length he said :

“I wonder how a fellow feels when he is suddenly stripped of all his wealth. Never had a chance myself of experiencing the sensation.”

“I dare say I shall soon experience it.”

“I should think it something like being skinned. How cold a fellow must feel after it !”

“I think I should feel the pain more than the cold,” said Maleenovsky ; “especially on such a day as this.”

It was the warmest day they had had that year. The rays of the sun were streaming down upon them ; and everything looked

bright and joyous, as if to join Lieutenant Alexeyev in his mockery of woe.

On arriving at the Senate, they soon learnt the issue of the trial. Judgment had gone against Captain Maleenovsky. He was scarcely taken by surprise. Many of the senators on whom he called had expressed their surprise at his audacity in dreaming that he could win any cause, however good, against such a man as Prince Ilinsky ; and it was the memory of this that had led him to speak so gloomily to Mr. Cameron of his chance of success. Prince Ilinsky was too powerful a man to be beaten with such weapons as he had used. Highness could employ the same weapons : only ten of them where captain used one.

And so the heavy blow had fallen at last. All the worry and struggle and cost of the last few months had been thrown away. That which he had feared so much had come : he was a beggar, with nothing to hope for. Life must henceforth be to him a struggle for a living. He received the news very quietly ; so quietly, that Lieutenant Alexeyev wondered at him. With all his chaffing, the scapegrace had some idea of the heaviness of the blow. He was anxiously watching Maleenovsky's

face: he could not see a nerve quiver, or a muscle move; not a change, indeed, of any kind in that grand, massive, masterful face. He might have been a marble statue for all the feeling that he showed. He felt, indeed, a strange sinking of heart within; but he was not going to be mastered by it: he was going to master it, and to master himself. So he bore up bravely. With a strong effort of will he kept down the feeling.

"I think we have no more business here," he said quite coolly, turning to go.

"Not that I know of," answered Lieutenant Alexeyev, following his friend.

But Captain Maleenovsky's innate politeness here came out in the midst of his own distress.

"I forgot," he said: "you wanted to be initiated into the sacred mysteries of this place."

"Oh, dear, no! Curiosity fully satisfied, old fellow," replied Alexeyev, laughing. "Features of venerable senators not so beautiful as I thought; and 'collective wisdom' of our country not so unlike what collective folly would be. Know two young fellows, at least, who would make more venerable senators."

“Let us go, then.”

They went out into the street, and turned toward Maleenovsky's lodgings. Alexeyev rattled on, but Maleenovsky did not utter a word. From time to time the young scapegrace looked in his friend's face, to see that he was “all right.” Well, he could not gather much from it. The same grand immovable face, showing no sign whatever: the only change which he could see being that it looked more vacant than usual, as if its accustomed tenant were far away. Alexeyev grew more and more anxious, and at length cried out:

“I say, old fellow, how are your feelings?”

“All right, old boy,” answered Captain Maleenovsky: “I feel something like a sheep that has just been shorn.”

Lieutenant Alexeyev burst out laughing.

“That's why you look as if you were wool-gathering; it's to cover your nakedness. But never fear, old fellow: the wool will grow again before the winter comes.”

They had reached Captain Maleenovsky's lodgings; and Alexeyev went in with his friend.

“I shall never forget what you have done for me to-day!” exclaimed the captain, as

soon as they were alone in the sitting-room. "False friends, like rats, forsake the sinking ship ; but you——"

"I say, isn't it too soon to talk of that? I didn't know till this morning that the ship was sinking; and I could not, in common decency, leave it sprawling in the mud and filth of the Senate-house, you know. Wait till to-morrow, old fellow!"

"Ah, Vassinka, you have a heart——"

"Take a pipe, old fellow, do! We are no longer in the street, you see. Sorry I can't join you: must go back to the Palace at once. Imperial Highness, and all that sort of thing. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, old boy! God bless you!"

Lieutenant Alexeyev looked as if he wanted to say more, but could not bring himself to say it. Fear of "lapsing into sentimentalism?" With his usual coolness and nonchalance he went out, and left Captain Maleenovsky alone. But, in a few moments, the door opened; and the handsome face peeped in, looking more beautiful than ever.

"Not smoking yet!" he cried. "Now, do, to please me: best cure going. I say, old fellow, you are a MAN!"

And the handsome face disappeared again.

Captain Maleenovsky rang the bell. When Vanka came, he told him that all was lost; and left orders not to be disturbed by any one, on any account, as he wished to be alone. Vanka did not interpret the order as forbidding *him* to look in. So, from time to time, he peeped into the room. It was touching to see how softly that rough fellow moved about, and what deep sorrow was pictured on his coarse face. The calamity might have been his own, instead of his master's. Each time he looked into the room, Captain Maleenovsky seemed to be in the same attitude: with his elbows leaning on the table, and his face buried in his hands.

Well, it *was* a heavy blow. Captain Maleenovsky was not a man to underrate wealth. He knew all that it was, and all that it represented. Hitherto he had lived in luxury; moved in the highest circles in St. Petersburg, and possessed everything that heart could wish and money buy. Farewell to all that! Henceforth he would be in the strictest sense a poor man. His pay as captain was a paltry pittance, not large enough to maintain a corporal in comfort. But all this he could bear:

ay, and bear bravely; without a murmur or a sigh. If need were, he would live on bread and water. So long as he could keep body and soul together, he would not grumble. Life was, after all, more than meat, and body than raiment. Such a paltry thing as that would not make him unhappy. His iron will would cut him a way to pierce through all such petty barriers.

But, alas, the loss of wealth was not his heaviest loss. As he had said to Mr. Cameron, it entailed other losses. Farewell to many of his friends! He could not mingle among them freely; because he could no longer live as they lived. Farewell to his home! The place of his birth; the playground of his childhood; once cherished as the destined resting-place of his old age. Farewell to his serfs! All of them endeared to him by old associations, and some of them by personal ties of the tenderest kind. And, worst of all, and hardest to bear, farewell to Helen Cameron! At that thought, all the man in him seemed to be bowed and shaken. To dwell upon it, he felt, would unman him; and, therefore, by a stern effort of will, he turned his thoughts to another branch of the subject. His serfs! Now that he was

about to part from them, solemn thoughts came over him as to his relation to them. Thoughts which, in the time of his wealth, he had utterly lost sight of! He had been master of souls: had he done his duty by them? He had been, on the whole, what was called a kind master. But had not his kindness been fitful; guided by changeful whim, rather than governed by wise unbending law?

Perhaps it was natural that his thoughts should at last rest on Vanka, as a symbol of his other serfs. Vanka, as his valet, had had the most to do with him, and had suffered the most from his fits of ill-temper. He remembered now how often he had struck him without a cause; and the thought of it filled him with something like remorse. The feeling was foreign to his ordinary train of thoughts. His natural bent was to think more of his own authority than of his people's rights. His mind was of that stern, unbending class, to which the idea of order, and therefore of authority to enforce it, seems the foundation of all human relationship. But now his own great trouble had softened his heart, and made him more pitiful to others. The blast of ad-

versity had rent the veil which had stood between him and his serfs; and he saw the relationship between him and them in its true light. He felt that, if he were to begin life afresh, he would be a wiser and a kinder master. But what use in regretting the past? Could he do nothing to repair it? Yes, there was one act of atonement still in his power. He rang the bell again; and Vanka entered the room.

“How often have I beaten thee, Vanka?” asked Captain Maleenovsky.

Vanka was astonished, as he well might be, at such a question coming at such a time. Was his master becoming light-headed? Had his trouble upset his reason? He gave a vague answer :

“I have not counted, your honour.”

“How often have I struck thee without a cause?” continued Captain Maleenovsky.

“Oh, baarin” (master), “don’t think of that now,” answered Vanka.

“I can’t help thinking of that now, Vanka; now that I am about to part with thee.”

“Oh, baarin, baarin, God knows you have been a kind master to me, as masters go; and, if ever you struck me without a cause, there

have been other times when I have deserved a whipping without getting it; so that the one is a set-off against the other, you see."

"Vanka, if I had now the chance of remaining thy master, I believe I should never touch thee again."

Vanka's eyes were dim. He was proud and independent for a serf: but there was one sure way to his heart; and Captain Maleenovsky had taken it. He was struggling with his impulse to do what Russian serfs did every day, but what he had done only once before; to fall at his master's feet.

"Would to God that I could remain in your service!" he cried with breaking voice. "God knows I had rather be your valet than Prince Ilinsky's steward."

Prince Ilinsky had the reputation of being one of the hardest and most cruel masters in Russia.

"Vanka, wilt thou forgive me every act of injustice I have done thee?" asked Maleenovsky.

Vanka could resist no longer. The tears were streaming down his coarse-grained cheeks; and he fell on his knees before Captain Maleenovsky, and sobbed aloud.

“Oh, baarin, it is I that need forgiveness! I have often been careless of your interests.”

“Rise, then, Vanka; and let us shake hands, in token of our mutual forgiveness.”

Vanka rose, and shook hands with his master.

“I know you now,” he said: “I never knew what you were before.”

He then fumbled in his pocket, and brought out a huge leathern purse, which seemed to be well stuffed. This he quietly laid on the table before Captain Maleenovsky, who asked:

“What is this?”

Vanka took up the purse again, and poured out its contents on the table: bank-notes, gold, silver, and copper coins.

“This is what I have been storing up for years, to buy my own freedom with,” answered Vanka: “take it, baarin, and buy me for yourself from Prince Ilinsky.”

It was the master's turn to be touched. But he was amused at the same time. The idea of Vanka's advancing the money wherewith to buy *himself* tickled him hugely. He burst out laughing.

“What shall I do with thee when I have bought thee?” he asked: “I can't afford to

keep thee. I must shift for myself now, and learn to do without a valet."

"Shift for yourself!" cried Vanka: "how can you? The gentry can't do without us. Besides, baarin, I should not cost you much. And, if that were all, I could work, and earn money for you. I was considered a good craftsman when I was at Moscow; and I could earn a fortune for you in no time, baarin."

"No, Vanka, I will not hear of it. If thou canst earn a fortune, thou must earn it for thyself."

Vanka looked disappointed, and said:

"I suppose your honour is too proud to accept it from your old serf."

"It is not that, Vanka: I could take it from thee as readily as from any one."

"Well, then, take it for yourself, baarin. You must have had some heavy expenses of late. These lawyers and judges are sharks. It will help to pay their bills."

"It can't be, Vanka: I am as young as thou, and stronger; and I must learn to work my own way in the world. Besides, thou hast a mother and brothers to look after."

"They'll do, baarin. What a pity it is that that Mr. Izmailov is not here! Perhaps

he could help you out of your scrape ; he is a wonderful man !”

“Well thought of !” exclaimed Maleenovsky : “I wonder I did not think of that before.”

And the words which Mr. Izmailov had used at Doobeenovka flashed across his mind : “If you fail in the Senate, appeal to his highness, Count Golovin ; and, if he should be in office at the time, he will see justice done.” Why not appeal to the count ? In a moment all his hopes revived. Oh, heavens ! Perhaps he might yet call Helen Cameron his own !

He went at once to the Secret Police Office. Luckily Mr. Tolstoy was within, and received him in very friendly fashion. Could he see the count ? Unhappily, highness not at home ! When would he return ? Quite uncertain : very likely, not for weeks. Oh, the suspense ! The uncertainty ! The past few months seemed likely to be renewed. Still, on the whole, he was inclined to hope for the best.

Meanwhile, things were taking place, which made it doubtful whether it would be in Count Golovin’s power to help Captain Maleenovsky. An intrigue was going on to

oust him from office. Influences were brought to bear on the Emperor himself to further that end. And, while the gallant captain awaits the count's return, let us go to the Winter Palace, and watch the progress of the intrigue.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE RECLUSE.

“There could I meditate on follies past,
And, like a weary voyager escaped
From risk and hardship, inwardly retrace
A course of vain delights and thoughtless guilt
And soft indulgence, without shame pursued.”

WORDSWORTH: *The Excursion*.

I ASK pardon of the Winter Palace and all its contents, live stock included (crowned heads not excluded), for overlooking them so long. Crowned heads so often appear as mere lay-figures on the pages of history, that they might seem to be of no earthly interest to any but their valets. But, after all, kings and queens are men and women, of like passions with ourselves, with thoughts and aims of their own; and the owner of the Winter Palace, at this time, was the hero of a life-drama interesting enough to have made him the hero of our book.

A man's room is often a type of himself. The Emperor Alexander's private cabinet revealed a neat and orderly mind. The tables and desks at which he sat were *kept tidy*. He returned every article he used to its right place,

and cleared away the slightest speck of dust or the smallest piece of paper unconnected with the work in hand. There were several desks in the room ; and on each there lay a folded cambric handkerchief, and ten quills newly mended. He never used the same pen twice. Pens, supplied by contract : contractor receiving three thousand roubles a year for keeping majesty in pens ; no doubt getting pretty pickings out of his contract ! In this neat room, on an easy-chair, sat the Emperor, looking as neat himself, and as still and quiet as if he were a part of the furniture.

Look at him. No denying it: there is clearly much that is noble and beautiful in that man. Something in that large and lofty brow, that open good-natured face, that kindly-beaming eye, which draws one's heart at once: telling of a high tone of thought, a tenderness of feeling, a refinement of taste, which have thrown a halo of poetry round the name of Alexander. In truth, a gentle, loving, lovely character ! Ah, but there is something wanting in that face. A weakness in that mouth, and an air of wavering in the eye, hinting that he had not the strength of purpose needed for governing a great unmanageable country like Russia.

Nature had cut him out for private life ; and cruel mocking fate had placed him on a throne. He had all the qualities which adorn society : how happy he might have been as a simple citizen !

Was he not happy, then ? What more could heart wish for than he had ? With no one to dispute his will ; with wealth enough to buy all that the world could sell ; with friends ready to lay down their lives for his ; with a devoted wife, true and loyal to him through faithfulness and through unfaithfulness, through good report and through evil ;—was he not happy, then ? Ah, brothers, just look into his face and judge for yourselves : a gloom on that brow, a sadness in that eye, a puzzled weary look over the whole, which go far to answer the question. Ay, “each heart a secret burden bears.” But what was Alexander’s burden ? Why, just that weight of pomp and state which you and I are envying in our hearts. Tired of worldly pleasure ; tired of imperial splendour ; almost tired of life, with its work and its joy ;—he longed to come down from the throne.

When he mounted it everything had been in a state of disorder. The mad tyranny of Paul had disorganised society. The young Czar had

honestly tried to remedy this state of things, and to bring the Russian Government into greater harmony with European ideas of freedom and right. For a long time all had gone on swimmingly. But there came a check: he was arrested by numberless difficulties. If he had been a man of iron will, like his brother Nicholas, he might, perhaps, have overcome them in time. But he was not the man for the work. Gentle, liberal, large-souled, enthusiastic, as he was, his character lacked depth to match its breadth. He was soon disheartened; and, as he grew older, and awoke out of the dreams of his youth, he gave up his reforms in despair. Another instance of a man who would have been thought *capax regnandi nisi regnasset*. But this was not the worst. The difficulties he encountered made him so weary of life that he withdrew from the management of public affairs. The helm of state was deserted by the pilot, and fell into any chance hands that might choose to grasp it. He talked of "abdicating:" better if he had done so when he found himself unfit to rule. Instead of that he did the worst thing he could have done: he kept his post, but intrusted the power to—Count Baranovitch.

Had you known him in his earlier years you

would scarcely recognise in him now the once gallant gentleman: the life of all society, the soul of all gaiety, foremost in plans of amusement as in works of charity. It is true he was far from being well. But that was not all. He was worn out; bodily as well as mentally worn out! And worn out before his time: an old, old man at forty-eight!

But why was he alone? Had he no children to brighten him with their smiles? None! No wife to soothe him by her caresses? Yes, but—— There was a cloud between husband and wife! No friends, at least, to cheer him up? Yes, but he was in one of his low desponding moods, when he always sought to fly the face of humankind. He would retire to his cabinet and remain alone for hours. At such times none but his mother durst approach him. Friends, are you envying emperors and kings? Envy them not; but rather thank God for having placed you lower down in the scale of life. An awful thing to have, or think you have, the burden of millions hanging on your shoulders! Nearly as awful to be shut out from one's kind by a high partition-wall of rank: never to be approached save at a fearful distance, and with a fearful show of forms; to

have no friend to speak to, as man to man, with perfect love and perfect trust !

Alexander had sat long, absorbed in thought, when he heard a knock at his door. He knew it was his mother: no one else would have ventured to disturb him in his retreat. He rose and opened the door; and a venerable-looking old lady entered the cabinet. She was seventy years old: but her figure was erect, her movements youthful and quick; and you would scarcely have taken her to be the mother of the old-looking man before her. It was beautiful to see the "absolute monarch," the master of fifty millions, meekly bow his head before that feeble old woman.

"My son, is this right?" asked the Empress-mother, sitting down in the easy-chair which Alexander had just left.

"Oh, mother," answered the master of millions, "I am weary of life!"

"And you are tired of His work already?"

"Ah, mother, it has been a hard task," said the Emperor wearily: "the age is so corrupt."

"If times are bad, why not try and mend them?"

"Mother, I *have* tried: I have done my best. But it is of no use. My purest motives

have been misunderstood, and my wisest plans laughed down; and, at this very moment, mother, some of them are plotting to take my life."

"It is the Cross which the Master has given you to bear. Ah, my son, where would you and I have been, if He had refused to bear His Cross?"

"Mother, I stand rebuked."

Thoughts like these had always great power over Alexander's mind: his mother knew it, and often used them with great success in his moments of weariness and grief. There was a meekness in his tone and manner, which was touching to see. Better still, if that meekness had been nerved by firmness and strength!

The old lady bade him follow her; and the Emperor of Russia, the master of millions, obeyed at once. She led the way to that part of the Winter Palace which was occupied by the reigning Empress: her daughter-in-law, and his wife. They found the Empress in her favourite sitting-room, which looked out on the Neva, sitting with some of the ladies of her suite. One of these, Anna, Princess Donskaya, we have already met, in the height of her triumph, at the ball which ushered Helen

Cameron into the fashionable world. But how changed! You would scarcely have known her again. Dress, look, demeanour, all belonged to quite another woman. Ah, Anna was a first-rate actress! But what *rôle* was she acting now? You will soon see. As she meekly cast her eyes to the ground, every now and then quietly lifting them to the skies (or at least to the ceiling), you would have said that she was, indeed, a fit lady-in-waiting to the lady to whom I wish now to introduce you —THE EMPRESS ELIZABETH.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE WIFE.

“The bodily frame was wasted day by day :
Meanwhile, relinquishing all other cares,
Her mind she strictly tutor'd to find peace
And pleasure in endurance. Much she thought,
And much she read, and brooded feelingly
Upon her own unworthiness
Meek saint, through patience glorified on earth !
In whom, as by her lonely hearth she sat,
The ghastly face of old decay put on
A sun-like beauty, and appeared Divine !”

WORDSWORTH: *The Excursion*.

At the age of forty-six, the Empress Elizabeth still looked young. Hers was a style of beauty which never grows old: because it was as much beauty of the mind as of the body. Her features, indeed, were regular and classical; and a face which is blessed with such, like good port, rather improves with age. But she had no colour in her cheeks: what little she once had, had long since been chased away by the sorrows which had fallen to her lot, and was replaced by a fixed look of sadness. Ah, what tales that pale, sad face told! Still it beamed with thought and love. There was a harmony about it which struck one at first sight: the

thoughtfulness about the brow, and the liveliness about the eye, in perfect keeping with the sweetness of the mouth. Her beauty belonged to that class which we may call "lovely:" and, at the age of forty-six, she was lovely still; nay, lovelier than she had ever been in all her life before. A sweet Madonna face! A Madonna whose soul the sword had pierced!

And sorrows she *had* seen, sure enough! Married before she was fifteen to a handsome, talented, and amiable young prince, who was himself little more than sixteen, she had given him the whole of her young heart. And what shall I say but that, at that time, he fully returned her love? For years they lived together in mutual love and bliss, which seemed to grow with every year. Two little ones were born to them: but they both died in babyhood; and "the happy pair" had no other children. But they were enough for each other. She was his "angel in the house." And he was her hero: nay, more, her idol, her god; for, if ever woman worshipped a man, most certainly Elizabeth worshipped Alexander.

Why should such happiness not last? Why need two hearts, which have been so closely knit together, ever be sundered? Yet so it

was. Whose the fault? The husband's. Why hide faults which Alexander himself, in after years, frankly acknowledged and manfully forsook? He neglected the wife of his youth for younger and more showy beauties. He has gone to his account; and a just God has, doubtless, forgiven him. But a just God also punished him for his unfaithfulness, in the solitude and sadness of his later years. Who but a wife should have been with him then, to soothe his sick and wounded soul? That wife was there, longing to comfort him; and he was yearning for her love, and for the gladness of their youth. But he himself had "fixed" "a great gulf" between them which it was hard to cross.

And she? Ah, me! Talk of sorrow! What sorrow can overtop that which she had borne during those long years of living martyrdom? To see the husband of her youth wavering in his faith; to see him estranging his heart from her, and fixing it on others; to see her rivals flaunting before her in all the insolence of triumph; to live in the same house with him, and see him daily, as if there were nothing wrong; to meet him every day with the keen remembrance of what they had been to each

other; and to play out the same tragedy over and over again, not for one day or one week, but day after day and week after week, month after month and year after year;—think of that, if you would understand the story of her sad face.

The Empress never murmured : she bore all in silence, with a heroic strength of endurance which went far to insure its own victory. None but God and her own heart ever knew what she suffered; and the only sign which the world saw of it was in her tell-tale face. If she wept, it was in secret. Once, and once only, she had been caught weeping over a miniature of the beautiful but faithless Alexander. All this time her own heart never swerved from the idol of her girlhood. False as he had been to her, she was true to him. In the night of her sorrow, God had revealed Himself to her, as He so often does. In her loneliness she had learned to say: “And yet I am not alone; for the Father is with me.” In her helplessness she had learned to pray; and she never prayed without pleading for the husband of her youth. Somehow or other, she had gained the assurance that he would yet come back to her. The way, she knew, would be dark and long; but the end, she was sure,

would be light and peace. Years passed away ; and her hope seemed further than ever from fulfilment. But she never gave way to despair : still she hoped on ; and still she prayed on.

Once, indeed, the day of deliverance seemed to have come. It was when Alexander, as he himself said, "recognised the Almighty as He is revealed in His Holy Scriptures." I must do him the justice to say that then he did feel the wrong which he had done to his noble wife. His heart turned to the wife of his youth ; and he yearned after her with a yearning which blended the freshness of youth with the fullness of riper years. O true and loyal heart ! Is thy hope about to be fulfilled ? Ah, it is easier to estrange two hearts than to make them one again ! The very memory of the wrong robbed Alexander of the strength to woo his wronged wife back again. He was unworthy of her love : could he hope that she would love him again as in days of yore ? If he had only known how true she was to him ; how, during all those years of estrangement, she had ever turned to him, as the sunflower turns to the sun even when hidden by a cloud ; how, in spite of all her sorrow, and her shame on his account, he had all along remained the

idol of her heart ! But he did not know it : delicacy and pride alike forbad her to reveal it.

And so life passed with these two, in that magnificent Winter Palace. Outwardly they lived together, but inwardly as far asunder as if seas had severed them. His mother, as now, made many efforts to reunite them ; but, well meant as they were, it is doubtful whether they did more harm or good. No pressure from without can solder hearts. Good old lady ! Little did she dream that the very fact of being *brought* together raised a barrier between them. If they could have *come* together of themselves, and by themselves, there would have been more hope. Dear old lady ! Her loving motherly eye shone brightly now ; and a ray of hope lighted up her pleasant face, as she went before her son into her daughter-in-law's apartment.

The Empress Elizabeth and her ladies rose, as mother and son entered the room. There was greeting between husband and wife : courteous enough ; but, ah, so stiff and cold ! The Empress was struck with her husband's woe-begone appearance. She was on the very point of giving utterance to some glowing words. But she checked herself in time. Deli-

cacy and pride alike forbad her to speak. It was for him to make the first advances. But, as she looked at him, her eyes grew dim. Ah, what a change had come over him ! He looked an old man now, bowed down with weariness and care : how unlike the strong bright hero of her young wedded life ! *Sic transit !* And then she spoke : a sweet gentle voice it was.

“Your Majesty does not look well this morning,” she said very quietly.

“I do not feel very well,” answered Alexander, just as quietly.

That was all ! He longed to say more ; but he dared not. The anxious tone in which his wife had spoken, and the pitying look which beamed from her lovely face, reminded him of what she used to be in days of yore, in sickness and in grief. He longed to fold her once more to his bosom : to pour out his whole soul before her ; his penitence, his change of heart, his re-awakened love. But not before strangers ! Then why not see her alone ? Would it seem so very strange for husband and wife to be together ? The very thought was alarming. What could he do ? How could he speak ? He was not strong enough this day. Some other day !

And so it had gone on for years : “ some other day,” and “ some other day !” He had put it off day after day ; and, as with the shrinking bather, who stands shivering on the shore, it became harder and harder for him every day to plunge in. Still, at this moment, his longing to be at one again with his wife was so great, that one might have hoped it would overcome even the habit of a lifetime. Vain hope !

“ I am afraid your Majesty does not take enough care of yourself,” said Elizabeth.

All this time, the Empress-mother had been looking anxiously at the couple ; “ hoping against hope ” that her well-meant attempt would somehow succeed at last. She now thought it wise to put in a word.

“ That he does not,” she said eagerly. “ He shuts himself up in his cabinet ; and if I did not come in sometimes, and drag him out, he would remain alone all day.”

Well, it was not a wise speech to make at such a time, and in such a place. It reminded Elizabeth a little too keenly that the mother had still some power over Alexander, while the wife had none. She felt her heart shut up ; and some words, which she was about to utter, were frozen on her lips. Still,

she was very anxious about her husband's health.

"Your Majesty should see more company," she urged.

"Ah, if I only knew that you would be that company!" thought Alexander.

"Why should I not be with you?" Elizabeth was saying in her heart at the very same time.

Then the Emperor spoke aloud :

"Your Majesty knows very well that I never was particularly fond of company——"

And there he stopped : could not finish the sentence. He had meant to add : "when you were with me." But it suddenly struck him that that would be going too far. The sentence, unfinished as it was, expressed anything but the historical truth. And so Elizabeth thought. But his appeal to her knowledge of him touched her. It took her back to the days that were gone. She pictured him to herself as he used to be : a bright, joyous, handsome, lovely young man ; the life and soul of all society, and so kind and loving to her

"That he might not beteen the winds of heaven
Visit her face too roughly."

And now what was he ? A withered, broken-down old man at forty-eight !

But an answer seemed to be called for by his appeal, untrue as it was. So she answered, smiling :

“My memory does not record the fact.”

The Emperor was in a fix. He could not explain what he had meant ; and, to get out of his dilemma, he stumbled into generalities. Those generalities : so convenient at a pinch !

“The memory begins to be treacherous at our time of life,” he said.

And then he felt as if he had gone too far in coupling himself with her by talking of “our time of life.” Such an unheard-of thing for husband and wife to be coupled together ! As for Elizabeth, she felt a choking sensation in her throat ; and it was a hard task for her to go on talking as they had been doing. But she struggled with her feelings, and at length mastered herself.

There was some more talk : but it was on the most trifling subjects ; the weather, the state of the Neva, the news from France ! Not a word even glancing at the thought which was nearest the heart of each. And then the Emperor passed on, and began to talk with Anna. And these two were man and wife ! And they had not seen each other since the

day before, and were not likely to see each other till the day after ! And once they were all in all to each other ; loving each other with a love which each thought would last “till death did them part !”

How can two hearts, which have once been one, be sundered so far ? How can a man speak in that fashion, day after day, and year after year, to the once cherished wife who has lain in his bosom and been folded by his arms ? How can they meet without the feeling of what they have been to each other ? And, *with* that feeling, how can they meet and part again in this fashion day after day ? How can they help revealing themselves to each other ? How can two hearts, that have loved each other so well, understand each other so ill ? Life is full of mysteries !

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INTRIGUE.

“For once when Arthur, walking all alone,
Vext at a rumour rife about the queen,
Had met her, Vivien, being greeted fair,
Would fain have wrought upon his cloudy mood,
With reverent eyes, mock-loyal shaken voice,
And flutter'd adoration, and at last
With dark sweet hint of some who prized him more
Than who should prize him most.”

TENNYSON: *Idylls of the King*.

ALEXANDER could speak far more freely to Anna. If you had seen them as they talked together, you would have said that there was far more confidence between them than between husband and wife. Well, it could not be denied that the bewitching Princess Don-skaya was a favourite with the Emperor. He was a great admirer of beauty; and all acknowledged that Anna was handsome. Still, you may be surprised that such a character should have pleased a man like Alexander. No need for wonder: the Emperor had but little insight into character. He was naturally open and trustful. It is true, he became more distrustful in his latter years. But that was simply because he had been so often deceived.

His distrust did not in the least add to his power of discrimination. His doubts rested as often on the wrong man as on the right. At the very time that he distrusted some worthy people who were too true to humour all his fancies, he trusted the unworthy who adapted themselves to his prejudices and his whims. It was altogether a matter of hap-hazard.

Again, you must not forget that I was not at his elbow to warn him against Anna, as I have warned you. It is a common mistake among readers of history to fancy that the characters described must have appeared in the same light to the men and women among whom they lived as they do to themselves. In reading a scene in a drama or a novel, representing a crafty fellow hoodwinking an honest man, we are apt to look down on the dupe, and cry: "What a simpleton!" Have not you and I said so even in scenes from "Othello?" Do you think Othello would have done what he did, if he had known Iago as you and I know him? The villain only let him see just so much of him as he wished. With the clue which I have given you, you know Anna's character as Alexander could not. To him she was simply a remarkably winning, hand-

some, and clever woman. But there was more than this; because Anna had taken great care to adapt herself to the Emperor's prejudices, and even to his beliefs. I have said she was a first-rate actress; and she had studied Alexander as a great actor might study Hamlet or Lear. She knew his weak points thoroughly. Above all, she had taken account of his "pious" leanings; had sternly drilled herself to the religious views which he held and the religious language which he used. She could talk piously; could use his "cant," as she called it, though she had not depth enough to know that it was reality to him. So that to Alexander she seemed, not only a remarkably handsome and noble woman; but a wonderfully pious *dévôte*, who could enter into his holiest feelings, and his deepest views.

So the Emperor and the Princess Donskaya entered into what seemed a confidential talk. They were far enough from the rest not to be overheard; but the Empress could not help remarking the warmth of her husband's manner, and contrasting it with the stiffness and coldness of his demeanour to herself. She was not jealous: the day for jealousy had long gone by. But she was pained nevertheless.

After a few remarks which no way concern our history, Anna adroitly brought in a subject which lay just then very near her heart: Count Golovin, the chief of the secret police. An intrigue had been formed against the count, chiefly by great noblemen, whose misdeeds he had checked. Their aim was to drive him out of office. Anna had entered heart and soul into the intrigue. She herself had been unpleasantly curbed more than once by the count, and had vowed to have her revenge. And so Captain Maleenovsky's hopes of being righted with Count Golovin's help hung in the balance during the talk which was going on. Anna managed her part of the talk very cleverly. Knowing Alexander's humane disposition, she spoke chiefly of what she called Count Golovin's "cruelty:" how his very name was a "terror" to men; how he was commonly called "the terrible Count Golovin." Some truth in that, as in most lies. But not the whole truth: only a half-truth. The whole truth would have run thus: "a terror to evil-doers, and a praise to them that do well."

The Emperor was grieved and shocked. He did not know Count Golovin well; had seen

him seldom. But, from what little he *had* seen of him, he did not judge very favourably of the man. Why disguise the truth? Count Golovin was too truthful and manly to adapt himself to Alexander's weaknesses and whims. Whenever he met the Emperor, he had so many stern and painful truths to tell that he had no time to waste in pleasing talk. Alexander thought Golovin decidedly too stern. So different from himself in that respect! But, then, Alexander, ostrich-like, was hiding his head in the bush, to shut out the evils around him, while Count Golovin was manfully grappling with them. Still it was due to a public servant not to listen lightly to frivolous charges.

"Are you sure about it?" asked the Emperor.

"I am quite sure," answered Anna glibly. "Alas, one hears of it from too many quarters; and of late the public voice has rung too frequently with the terror of his name."

Princess Donskaya spoke with an air of assurance which went far to set all Majesty's doubts at rest. He could only say, in a helpless sort of way:

"It is strange that I have heard nothing about it before."

“Alas, your Majesty has of late been so secluded from the public,” replied Anna feelingly; “and, at the best of times, it is so hard for the naked truth to reach the ears of monarchs.”

“True, true; very true!” said Alexander, nodding his head.

“It is this that has emboldened me to speak of it to your Majesty,” continued Anna, assuming a bolder tone as she saw her way clearer before her. “Since no one else would set you right in this matter, I felt it to be a solemn duty resting upon me, a duty before God as well as before your Majesty, to speak out honestly, and, if possible, save the poor trembling wretches who groan beneath the tyranny of ‘the terrible Count Golovin!’”

Anna was a woman who weighed her words, as well as the general tenor of her speech. It was a clever stroke to wind up her sentence with the dreadful-sounding name. And the stroke went home. Alexander had been growing excited as Anna spoke; but the name fell like the blow of a sledge-hammer on his ears. It drove the nail in to its very head.

“It is shameful!” he cried indignantly.

“And, if, in discharging my painful duty,

I have overstepped the bounds of modesty, I humbly beg your Majesty's forgiveness," Anna went on to say.

And she cast her eyes so meekly to the ground, and looked so demure and saint-like, that Alexander was quite carried away by admiration.

"On the contrary, your Highness, I honour you for your courage and honesty," he said warmly: "you are a noble woman; one of the noblest women it has ever been my happiness to meet."

In his excitement, Alexander had raised his voice. He was growing deaf, and, like other deaf men, did not know at times how loud he spoke. His wife heard these words, and saw the look of admiration which accompanied them. A strange sickening at her heart: was the shameful past going to be renewed, then?

"I humbly thank your Majesty for your generous appreciation," answered Anna, actually blushing. "Oh, if your Majesty only knew what a trial it has been to me to speak; if you knew how it is only a solemn and overwhelming sense of duty to my God as well as to your Majesty that has enabled me to speak

at all;—you would understand the relief which your Majesty's approbation has given me."

"I understand it all—better than you may imagine," said Alexander, lowering his tone again: "I always feel more than I say; and I thank God that I have such a noble woman in my dominions."

And Alexander did really feel more than he said: his soul was for the moment absorbed in admiration of the noble and generous Princess Donskaya. Such disinterested pity for the oppressed! Such courage! Such honesty!

"God grant that all your subjects may be as loyal and true!" exclaimed Anna piously.

"Amen!" said Alexander. Then, after a short pause, he added: "But I wonder that his highness, Count Baranovitch, has not spoken to me about this."

"Your Majesty must remember, that, of late, your precious health has been such as to make the most faithful servant pause before he burdened you with any painful news."

"True!" said the Emperor. "All the more honour to you who could entertain a loftier sense of duty."

"The belief that your glorious reputation for clemency was being compromised and tar-

nished strengthened my resolve to speak to your Majesty."

Another clever stroke on the part of Anna. No point on which the Emperor was more touchy than that of the "clemency" of his reign. Alas for Russia! The "clemency" of Count Baranovitch's government! But ostrich popped his head into the bush, and saw nothing of what was going on. And yet he was really merciful. He hated cruelty from his inmost soul; and, as much as head-hiding ostrich could do, set his face against it in all its forms. No man living more anxious about his place in history: he was honestly proud of the name which he had earned as a merciful ruler; and there was no personal calamity which he dreaded more than the tarnishing of that name. His heart therefore answered at once to the chord which Anna had so cunningly struck.

"It is disgraceful!" he cried warmly.

The Princess Donskaya was watching him narrowly; and, seeing the richness of the vein she had hit upon, she resolved to work it a little further. The next haul was just as successful as the last.

"There was some danger," she said, "lest

the father of his country should acquire the name of a Nero."

This speech clinched the nail. Nero was the *bête noire* of Alexander's historical gallery. His excitement grew.

"It is too bad!" he cried.

Anna judged that this vein had been worked long enough, and went on to open another. But, like a wise engineer, she resolved to survey the ground before she set to work.

"Will your Majesty allow me to speak freely?" she meekly asked.

"By all means."

"Your Majesty has doubtless heard of secret societies, and plots to upset your Majesty's government."

"Certainly."

"I have reason to believe that these societies are greatly encouraged by Count Golovin's cruelties."

Another "palpable hit." In his latter years, Alexander dreaded the secret societies as much as he had encouraged them at first. He grew nervous and fidgety: indeed, he began to feel alarmed. So he said anxiously:

"I must speak about it to his highness, Count Baranovitch."

Now, this was just what Anna had all along wanted him to say.

“Your Majesty will not mention my name,” she said with some anxiety.

“Certainly not,” answered Alexander.

Anna was fully satisfied: her end was gained, as far as Count Golovin was concerned; and, when the end was gained, she was not in the habit of wasting any more words upon the means. She knew when to rest as well as when to work. So she let well alone.

But she had another end in view; about which she was still more anxious. I scarcely know how to describe it—so delicate is the subject. In few words, she wanted to gain such a hold on the Emperor’s mind as to become virtually Empress of Russia. Such things had been done in the past; and why not in the present day? Why not take a leaf out of the book of the Maintenons and the Pompadours? The price? She would pay no more than she chose.

This end she had steadily in view throughout the whole of the foregoing scene. While pleading against Golovin, she had really been pleading for herself; and she had done it so well, that the Emperor could not find words

strong enough to express his admiration. She now ventured a step farther: she had been laying the train; and she now went on to fire it.

“Your Majesty’s gracious reception of my humble suggestion emboldens me to speak on another point,” she said.

Somehow there was a subtle change in her: her looks, her tone, her manner, all betokened that she was no longer merely the loyal subject, but the tender friend. The change, though subtle, was unmistakable. Alexander felt it in a moment. He glanced at her uneasily, and asked:

“What is that, your Highness?”

“I would implore your Majesty to listen to the counsel which her Majesty gave you this morning.”

“To see more company?”

“Yes, your Majesty: your Majesty’s life is too precious to be lightly risked,” said Anna.

She looked bewitching: her face beamed with reverence; and it seemed as if she were ready to lay down her life for his.

“Ah, your Highness,” answered Alexander, with genuine meekness, “my life has been too worthless to be mentioned in such terms.”

Anna went on cunningly to take him on his blind side : she drew the very distinction which the Emperor himself was accustomed to draw. Putting on her devoutest tone, she said :

“It may be in the sight of God, but not in the sight of man. Believe me, there are millions who adore you as their best earthly friend ; and pray God, night and morning, to spare your precious life for many, many years to come.”

And Anna looked as if she adored him too ; and glanced upward piously, as if she were praying too. It was not in human nature, at least, not in Alexander’s nature, to be wholly proof against such a battery. He looked down on the bewitching princess gently, and said :

“But I have no taste for company.”

“I can quite understand that,” answered Anna softly : “but surely your Majesty may find some one who can sympathise with you ; who can cheer you in your loneliness, and feel delight in sharing all your sorrows and your cares.”

“Ah, your Highness, men are so cold and unfeeling !”

At that moment, Anna certainly looked most bewitching. And she turned her whole battery

of looks and tones upon Majesty, as she said :

“But women ?”

She spoke almost in a whisper ; but there was a meaning in her tone, which sent those little words straight to Alexander’s heart. His eyes beamed with joy : a new and bright idea flashed across his mind. He turned eagerly to Anna.

“Are you thinking of any one in particular ?” he asked in a low tone.

I do not know whether it was a part of her original plan, or whether she was really puzzled by an unlooked-for question ; but so it was, that Anna blushed, fell into a state of charming disorder, and stammered out a very vague answer. No sooner were the words out of Alexander’s mouth, than he felt that that was too public a place for so delicate a conversation.

“Oh, your Majesty, if I could only hope that my feeble words have had some weight with you !” exclaimed Anna.

“I shall have some other opportunity of speaking with you on this subject,” answered the Emperor, “when there will be no danger of our being overheard.”

And Alexander passed on, and soon took his leave.

Oh, the joy which those last words instilled into Anna's heart! Private assignation? She was fully satisfied with the progress she had made: her hint had fallen as seed into the Emperor's mind; and it would by-and-by take root, spring up, and bring forth fitting fruit.

But what was the Empress Elizabeth thinking all this time? She had seen all the tender looks which had been exchanged; she had overheard some warm and glowing words which her husband had uttered. I think there was none of her train but believed that the shameful past was about to be renewed. Could *she* escape the general belief? Patience, thou long-suffering heart!

CHAPTER XX.

COUNT GOLOVIN.

Provost. It is a bitter deputy.

Duke. Not so, not so : his life is parallel'd
Even with the stroke and line of his great justice :
He doth with holy abstinence subdue
That in himself which he spurs on his power
To qualify in others. Were he meal'd
With that which he corrects, then were he tyrannous ;
But this being so, he's just."

SHAKSPERE : *Measure for Measure.*

THERE was another who was anxiously watching the interview between Alexander and Anna. The Empress-mother could feel for her daughter-in-law. Ah, dear old lady, a long and weary time she had had of it during her own husband's life. The Emperor Paul was a brute. His first wife had lived only three or four years after her marriage ; and many believed that his cruel treatment had hastened her end. Alexander's mother knew better how to manage her half-cracked spouse ; but it had cost her many a pang, and had nearly crushed the life out of her.

At length, there had come a son to cheer her heart : and it was Alexander, her first-

born, the joy of her heart. Alas, in his very babyhood, he had been snatched away from her: not by the kindly arms of holy death, whose rest is calm and peaceful; but by the sturdy arms of that frightful ogress, the Empress Catherine, her mother-in-law, who meant to bring up the child, away from his father and mother, according to her own notion of things, which differed from decent people's on one or two points. The young mother was seldom allowed to see her son; and all free motherly and filial fellowship was sternly checked. Her honest German heart had rebelled against this cruel arrangement; but she too, like her daughter-in-law in after years, had learnt in time to bend her neck meekly to the yoke. Years passed away: son after son had been born to her; and son after son had been snatched away as soon as born. The heart-stricken mother had meekly bowed her head.

At length, the hour of deliverance came: frightful ogress went to her own place—wherever that may be. Mother and children were reunited. Who can tell the joy of that mother's heart, when she found in her eldest son a tenderness of filial love which his

wretched training had not eaten out? She was ready to cry out: "Let us be merry; for this my son was dead, and is alive again—was lost, and is found."

Alas, poor mother's heart! Still keener sorrow was in store for her. Who can say what a sword pierced through her heart, when her darling boy had to wade through her husband's blood to mount his throne: when the father was murdered to make room for the son; and, above all, when that son's surroundings, combined with his own weakness, forced him to raise his father's murderers to the chief offices of the state? There be tragedies played in high places, which we glibly talk of as "public events," and little reckon the "private feelings" which they touch. The mother still bore on, but was no longer dumb. Loudly she proclaimed her horror of the deed. Little cause had she to regret it on her own account: little cause had her husband ever given her to bewail his fate. Still she had been his wife: she had lain in his bosom, and shared his home. She was the mother of his sons; and she had been true and loyal to her children's father from first to last. And she denounced the dastardly murder in no measured terms.

Count Pahlen, the chief of the murderers, persuaded Alexander to remonstrate with his mother. But the mother was firm. "My son," she said, "you must choose between Pahlen and me." The son made his choice: in two hours, Pahlen and the other murderers were on their way to banishment.

From that time, life rolled on calmly over the mother's head. Alexander proved himself the best of sons: tender, loving, dutiful. There was only one point in which he had grieved her heart; and that was his forsaking the wife of his youth. The gentle Elizabeth had soon won her way to her mother-in-law's heart. The good old lady felt for the wronged wife as if she had been her own daughter. And, now that the wrong of those bygone days seemed likely to be renewed, her kindly heart again turned toward the patient sufferer. Her anxiety was so great, that, after a while, she followed her son.

She found him pacing his private cabinet in great excitement: a very unusual thing for him.

"My son, what is this?" she asked anxiously: "what has moved you so?"

"It is a political affair, mother," answered

Alexander courteously: "I have sent for Count Baranovitch."

"And have you been discussing political matters with her highness, Princess Donskaya?"

"Yes, mother."

"Is she not somewhat too young a counsellor?" asked the Empress-mother, looking anxiously at her son.

She was about to follow up this question with another, still more searching, when the arrival of Count Baranovitch put a stop to further questioning; and she was forced to retire.

It was not often the Emperor sent for Count Baranovitch; and therefore there was some excitement in the Prime Minister's manner as he entered the cabinet. What was the matter? Majesty heard any fresh news about the secret societies? Alexander's appearance did not reassure him. Screw loose somewhere!

"I hear complaints against Count Golovin's oppression and cruelty," said the Emperor warmly.

Count Baranovitch was taken aback.

"From whom has your Majesty heard those complaints?"

Ah, Anna was "wise in her generation," when she made the Emperor promise that her name should not be mentioned !

"Never mind from whom they come," answered Alexander, almost angrily. "Are they true ? That is the question."

"His Majesty is seriously angry," thought Count Baranovitch : "I must look after myself." Then aloud he said : "May I ask your Majesty what the complaints are ?"

"I understand that they are too notorious for your Highness not to have heard of them."

"Prince Ilinsky's case," thought the count.

"Is there any truth in them ?"

Highness going to be wary.

"Some truth, no doubt," he answered.

"How is it then that your Highness has not informed me of this ?" asked Alexander sternly.

"I thought it not important enough to trouble you with in your present state of health."

"Not important enough !" exclaimed the Emperor angrily : "when the glory of my reign is being tarnished ! Not important enough ! What does your Highness mean ?"

"Though Count Golovin may sometimes

err in severity, it is always on the side of justice ; and I can assure your Majesty that you have not an abler or more honest official in your service."

Wonderful stretch of faithfulness in highness toward a subordinate : highness not supposed to have too much of Lord Palmerston's spirit in such matters. If he had not felt that he was fighting for himself quite as much as for Count Golovin, he might have been astonished at his own courage.

"I hope I have many able and honest servants beside Count Golovin," answered Alexander ; " and, if he cannot act without oppression and cruelty, you must find some one else to fill his post."

" I hear, your Majesty."

Highness durst not say another word on behalf of a man, whom he knew to be guiltless of the charges brought against him, and whom he believed to be the mainstay of the country in its present critical state ! But might he not allude to the secret societies, and hint at the important service which Count Golovin was rendering in keeping them at bay ? Alas, Majesty forestalled him on that point.

" I understand, your Highness," he said,

looking straight into the Prime Minister's face, "that Count Golovin's cruelty is one main cause of the energy and success of the secret societies."

"After this, I must be dumb about Golovin!" thought the Prime Minister.

Fool that he was!

Highness saw clearly that Count Golovin must have some secret enemy at court. Who? He thought of several; but he never thought of Anna. Ah, wise in her generation!

"I see I am no longer equal to the task of governing this great country" continued Alexander solemnly; "and I think it would be sinful any longer to postpone my purpose of abdicating."

Highness seriously alarmed. Majesty fond of talking about "abdicating;" but never so solemnly as now. Prime Minister's power likely to end with Majesty's reign. Highness not a wonderful statesman: Majesty's successor not likely to keep him in his post. Highness therefore alarmed.

"Your Majesty's health has certainly not been good of late," he said; "but we may hope——"

Majesty cut him short.

“It is not that only : I am becoming mentally and morally disqualified from governing. That such abuses should creep in without the slightest check ! That oppression and cruelty should be practised in my name, and I be left in utter ignorance ! Oh, your Highness, it was not right !”

Highness forced at last, in self-defence, to take up the cudgels for Count Golovin.

“I feel sure the matter has been greatly exaggerated,” he said ; “and, if your Majesty will furnish me with the particulars, I will sift them to the bottom.”

“You have already acknowledged that there is some truth in it,” retorted the Emperor.

Highness shut up : such the result of having no principles to go upon, and going whithersoever the finger-post of expediency pointed.

“If your Majesty will deign to give me the authority on which you rely——” he was beginning to say.

But Majesty again cut him short.

“I do not choose to give you my authority !” he cried angrily.

“If your Majesty has no confidence in me, I do not see how I can carry on your government,” said Prime Minister.

Highness as fond of using this threat as Majesty that of "abdicating." Hitherto, when he used it, Majesty had always assured him of his "unabated confidence." This time, however, Majesty did no such thing, but startled highness by saying :

"Just what I think, your Highness. Hitherto I have felt that God has placed me in this awful position, and that, till He discharge me from it, I have no right to give it up. But now I begin to feel, that, when I lose the power of fulfilling the duty, it amounts to a discharge from the post."

"I must not give up Golovin," thought the count.

"I have quieted my conscience with the thought that I had your Highness to rely on," continued the Emperor ; "but, now that I hear of such oppression and cruelty carried on in my name, I see that it is indeed time for me to give way to a Sovereign who can personally attend to the government of the empire. I will visit my brother Nicholas tomorrow morning, and announce my purpose."

This looked like business : the first step in *carrying out* the purpose, which hitherto Majesty had only *talked about*. Highness saw

that there must be no more shilly-shallying on his part: that he must grapple with the matter in right earnest, and take his stand on something like reality ; in short, that, at the cost of eating his own words, he must stand by Count Golovin like a man. But he began his task warily, and by slow approaches.

“Your Majesty has mentioned the secret societies,” he said: “I have reason to believe that the purity and justice of Count Golovin’s administration has done more than anything else to baffle the conspirators.”

“And yet you would not defend him just now !” exclaimed the Emperor. “Oh, your Highness !”

If highness could have blushed through his parchment skin, he would have blushed now. What little conscience he had in him smote him for throwing Count Golovin overboard so readily: especially when he saw how little he had gained by his shabby trick; how much stronger his ground would have been if he had stuck by him manfully from the first; in short, how much wiser it would have been to take his stand on the firm rock of principle, instead of shifting about among the quicksands of expediency. So, by way of apology, he said:

“Your Majesty did not seem in a mood to listen to any explanation.”

“But how about his cruelty?”

“What your Majesty calls his cruelty I call his necessary severity; and that, I believe, has done more than anything else to silence the discontented.”

“How?”

“Because that severity has always been used against injustice and wrong: I have never yet heard of a case in which he has been severe to the innocent.”

“What becomes of the complaints, then?”

“Those complaints, which I have investigated, have all proved to be misrepresentations: if your Majesty will deign to give me the particulars which have reached your ears, I will at once institute an inquiry; and I have not the slightest doubt that they will turn out to be, what all the rest have proved, mere distortions of the truth, and exaggerations of necessary acts of justice.”

Majesty puzzled: too fair not to admit that justice to Count Golovin called for an investigation; but, on the other hand, hampered by his promise not to mention Anna's name.

“I cannot give up my authority,” he said at

length ; "because I have pledged my word not to do so."

"If your Majesty's informants required such a pledge, they must have doubted their ability to prove the charge," answered the count.

Majesty more puzzled still.

"I thought the complaints were notorious," he said, after a pause.

"Yes, your Majesty, it is notorious that Count Golovin is feared and hated by the guilty and the corrupt ; but it is just as notorious that he is revered and blessed by the innocent and the oppressed."

"That is a new view of the case altogether."

"It is the true view, your Majesty."

Refreshing to see how strong even the weak and wavering Count Baranovitch could become, when he took his stand on truth and right. Highness might have taken this ground from the first ; and then he would have been stronger still.

"It is due to his highness, Count Golovin, that I should suspend my judgment," said the conscientious Emperor at last.

"I think so too," replied Prime Minister, smiling grimly.

“And yet you would not defend him just now!” repeated Alexander. “Oh, your Highness!”

If highness blushed within, mottled parchment skin again concealed it from without. But I fear he did not blush. Indeed, he went on to say, with triumphant look and air not at all akin to blushing:

“But I have not done with Count Golovin yet. Your Majesty, it is owing solely to his unrivalled energy and skill that there is not a rebellion this very day.”

“To-day!” cried Alexander, horror-struck.

“Yes, your Majesty, the *Union* had fixed on this day for a rising; but Count Golovin found it out as usual, and has defeated all their plans.”

The “*Union*,” the name of the secret society, with branches throughout the country, formed for the purpose of upsetting the government of Alexander.

“Why not tell me all this before?” asked the Emperor.

“The danger was over; and it was not worth while to trouble your Majesty in your present state of health.”

There was a long pause, at the end of which Alexander said:

“Your Highness, all this makes it the more important that I should abdicate at once.”

“On the contrary, your Majesty, it makes it more important that the commencement of a new reign should be postponed as long as possible,” answered the count.

“In what way?”

“The leaders of the *Union* have been so disheartened by Count Golovin’s repeated detection of their plans, that they have resolved to postpone the insurrection to the end of your Majesty’s reign.”

“How do you know that?”

“Count Golovin has found it out.”

“Why, Count Golovin seems to know everything!” exclaimed Alexander, not without a touch of admiration, and then added with much feeling: “It seems that I am indebted to Count Golovin for much; perhaps even for my life and throne.”

“Undoubtedly, your Majesty; and allow me to assure you, as I have already done, that you have not an abler or more faithful servant.”

Soon after, Count Baranovitch went away; and the Emperor was left alone, to reflect on all that he had heard that day. Well, there was something to think about.

And so Count Golovin was safe for the present : and, with him, Captain Maleenovsky's chance of recovering his estate ; and, with that, the hope of his being able to make an offer to Helen Cameron. Ay, for the present ! But how long would that safety last ? Count Golovin's enemies were bitter and powerful, and, when one intrigue failed, would easily form another : above all, there was that arch-intriguer, Anna, Princess Donskaya, who had never yet been beaten in any serious work she undertook. On the whole, therefore, Captain Maleenovsky had a bad look-out.

CHAPTER XXI.

WORKING UNDERGROUND.

“Well said, old mole! Canst work i’ the ground so fast?”

SHAKSPERE: *Hamlet*.

COUNT BARANOVITCH was wholly unfitted for his post. Ignorant on most subjects; knowing no language but his own; narrow and bigoted to a degree which we can scarcely understand in England;—it is not to be wondered at that he failed. To tell the truth, his government had become a tyranny of the worst kind. Under the mildest of emperors, the most crushing despotism was driving the Russians to revolt.

But, bad as this was, it was not the worst. If Count Baranovitch had carried out some principle, however narrow or bigoted, he might have done his country some service. But the fact was, he had no settled political principles at all. The root-fault, which lay at the bottom of his government, was that it had no leading star of any kind. No one could ever guess beforehand how he would act in any given case. By turns he was gentle and cruel. His enemies maintained that he was gentle to the strong and

cruel to the weak : if you were strong enough to bully him, you might succeed ; but woe be to you (said they) if you were friendless and weak ! Under such a rule, no wonder that everything went wrong. Those who could discern the signs of the times saw that some outbreak must come, sooner or later, to clear the political atmosphere. This outbreak was in truth being quietly got ready underground : in spite of all precautions, *the Union of the Public Good* was preparing to blow up his government.

The following day Count Baranovitch had another interview with the Emperor. As he was leaving the private cabinet, Alexander put a sealed letter into his hand, and begged him to deliver it to the Princess Donskaya. Now the report of what had passed between Alexander and Anna, the day before, had spread at court, exaggerated, as it naturally was, in passing from mouth to mouth. Count Baranovitch was not sure that he was not intrusted with a letter relating to a private assignation. Nevertheless he took it, only too thankful that it had been intrusted to no other hands. Just think of a Prime Minister becoming the willing go-between in a private assignation ! He

argued, that, if there were any truth in the report, it would be as well for him to be on the best of terms with such a powerful personage as Anna would then become. So, putting the letter into his pocket, he walked on to the rooms which she occupied in the Winter Palace as lady-in-waiting to the Empress.

On his way there, it struck him that he might as well consult her about Count Golovin. It was not the first time he had consulted her on political matters. He had always found her shrewd and worldly-wise; had often followed her advice, and had never repented doing so. The fact was, he did not like the chief of the secret police. He admired his talents, and relied on his untiring watchfulness and zeal. But their views, their modes of thinking and working, were utterly unlike. Chief of secret police too unbending; too "romantic" and "enthusiastic" in his resolve to see justice done! Prime Minister often perplexed by his insisting on punishing some great nobleman who could do the government harm: as often annoyed by his dogged refusal to listen to any pleading, from himself and other members of the government, on behalf of their guilty friends. In short, Count Golovin "necessary," but a

“ *necessary evil* ;” and, if Prime Minister could have found another man of equal power, but of softer mould, to fill his post, he would have kicked present chief out.

Full of these thoughts, he entered Anna’s rooms. He found her busy with her dress-maker, discussing the merits of a new dress : so that many minutes passed before she had leisure to listen to Prime Minister. The shadow of her coming triumph already fell on the handsome coquette : there was a growing insolence in her tone and manner which somewhat marred the effect of her saintly look, and might have galled a higher-minded man than Count Baranovitch. There was a time when Prime Minister used to keep handsome coquette waiting : but now the tables were turned ; and handsome coquette simply paid Prime Minister in his own coin. Nevertheless Prime Minister bore it with becoming meekness : might not all Russia be at handsome coquette’s feet in a few days ? When the weighty business between her and the dressmaker was over, Anna sent the woman away, and turned to Count Baranovitch with her fascinating smile. But highness was so absorbed with the thought of Count Golovin, that he forgot all about the fateful

letter lying in his pocket, and opened at once on the subject nearest his heart at that moment. He said :

“It is hard to know what to do when placed between two fires. Here has Count Golovin been pestering me this morning, as he has done for months past : insisting on an inquiry into Prince Ilinsky’s treatment of his serfs, and actually threatening to resign if it is not made at once ! And here is his Majesty talking of the complaints which he has heard against Count Golovin ! One is nearly at one’s wits’ end between the two !”

“Complaints against Count Golovin !” cried Anna, with well-feigned astonishment : “why, I thought his pious highness was immaculate.”

For some cause or other, Anna fancied that it would be better for her not to seem Count Golovin’s enemy before the Prime Minister. I can’t explain her reasoning on the matter : I never could enter into all her subtleties, and sometimes thought that she loved a crooked policy for its own sake. There are those who love darkness rather than light ; and, it may be, that she really preferred to work in the dark. Whatever the motive, she had made up her mind to hide her enmity from Count

Baranovitch. He looked at her keenly for a moment, and answered :

“So thinks not his Majesty.”

“But complaints about what?”

“About his oppression and cruelty.”

“His highness Count Golovin oppressive and cruel!” exclaimed Anna again, with well-acted amazement, lifting her eyes to the ceiling : “I thought he was sternly just, and gracious withal.”

“His Majesty has heard a different account.”

It would have been hard for a man of greater insight than Count Baranovitch to pierce through the mask which Anna, Princess Donskaya, had put upon her face. With pious horror she cried out :

“What *is* the world coming to?”

“We all have our enemies, my dear,” answered the count.

“From whom does he receive those complaints?” asked Anna.

Through her look of astonishment, a keener observer than Count Baranovitch might have detected a feeling of anxiety. Had Majesty kept his promise not to mention her name?

“That is more than I can tell you, child,” answered the Prime Minister : “his Majesty

will not inform me; but I am determined to know—that I can tell you.”

“I see I can trust his Majesty’s word,” thought Anna.

And, in spite of the mask she wore, a well-contented smile passed across her face. For who can always act? Count Baranovitch detected the smile.

“Well, what is your Highness smiling at?” he asked.

“At your cool determination to find out what his Majesty has refused to tell you,” answered Anna, without a moment’s faltering.

“I tell you what,” said the count: “I *will* know it.”

“Ay, but how?”

Anna was beginning to feel somewhat uneasy.

“By working on his Majesty’s conscience,” answered Count Baranovitch, in a rather pompous manner.

“On his Majesty’s conscience?”

“Yes: I cross-questioned his Majesty; and I found that there was nothing tangible about the charges.”

“But, pray, what has all this to do with his Majesty’s conscience?” asked Anna anxiously.

“He is too conscientious not to see, sooner

or later, that it would be wrong to shelter the dastardly slanderers who have poisoned his ears with such empty rubbish."

"Ha, ha, ha! That is good!"

Anna was now in a flutter of anxiety. The worst thing that could happen to her would be to forfeit the character for straightforwardness which she had gained in the Emperor's eyes. What if Prime Minister were to come to an understanding with Majesty about *her*? She was, therefore, becoming excited; and, as was not uncommon with her, the current, dammed up by barriers of prudence, frothed and bubbled over in loud bursts of laughter.

"And what are you laughing at now?" asked Baranovitch, somewhat testily.

"At your threatened attack on his Majesty's conscience," answered Anna: "had you not better take a crowbar with you, in case arguments should fail?"

And she laughed louder than ever.

"But was it not mean and dastardly in them to poison his Majesty's ears with such lies?"

"Oh, very!"

"And ought they not to be punished?"

“Decidedly—if you can catch them!”

“Catch them? No fear about that!”

“It seems to me that you are cooking the goose before you’ve killed it,” said Anna, becoming still more anxious.

“No, no, your Highness; I am only beating about to catch the goose.”

“But what is this case of Prince Ilinsky?”

None knew better than Anna. Prince Ilinsky, having heard of Count Golovin’s efforts to bring him to the bar of justice, had come up to Petersburg to look after his own interests. He was an old friend of Anna’s father; and, only three days before, he had called on her to secure her influence with Majesty.

“Why, it seems that one of Count Golovin’s agents, Marlinsky or Baranovitch by name (these spies have as many *aliases* as the thieves they hunt down), was at Prince Ilinsky’s estate at Groozeno, when the prince was knouting one of his serfs; and it turned out that the poor fellow’s only fault was his having refused to give up his daughter to Prince Ilinsky for a certain purpose—you will understand what.”

"But I thought that a nobleman could do what he liked with his serfs," Anna put in.

"Yes, to a certain extent; but this was overstepping all bounds of propriety."

"Well?"

"A certain Ensign Bibikov had just come in with despatches from Petersburg; and, being a rash, enthusiastic young fellow, what does he do but rush in between Prince Ilinsky and his prey?"

"Intolerable impertinence!" exclaimed Anna. "To think that a great nobleman cannot do what he likes with his own, but every petty officer in the army is to insult him in his own house, and before his own servants!"

Could Count Baranovitch guess that Anna had known Ensign Yakov Bibikov from her very childhood? That his father had been her father's most intimate friend for many years? That, on the very occasion they were talking of, this very Ensign Bibikov had gone on from Prince Ilinsky's house to make an offer of marriage to her sister Elena? Well, certainly he could not: still he fancied that she knew more of the case than she cared to acknowledge. He looked at her keenly, and said:

“ You know something about the affair, my child ? ”

“ Nothing but what you have told me. ”

Anna spoke as calmly as if she had been giving utterance to the most undoubted truth.

“ I said nothing about the presence of servants. ”

“ Why, of course, there must have been servants present, ” answered Anna, somewhat hastily.

For the first time, she was just slightly flurried. She had made a false step. She laughed, it is true ; but she resolved, nevertheless, to be more careful, because the worth of her running criticisms would depend on their seeming to be suggested by his own statement.

“ Why must there have been servants present ? ” asked the Prime Minister eagerly, looking keenly at Anna.

“ He would not flog the fellow with his own hand. ”

“ Wouldn't he, though ? He is capable of it, I can assure you. You don't know the man. ”

Oh, didn't she ?

“ Well, and what followed ? ”

"The ensign got knouted, and the prince insulted him."

"Served him right!" exclaimed Anna emphatically. "What business had he to interfere?"

"And then Count Golovin's agent interfered, and got the poor young officer out of the prince's clutches."

"I would have left him to his fate," said Anna, almost savagely. "But the impudence of these spies is past endurance: they fancy they can do what they like on noblemen's estates. Really, your Highness, you ought to put some check upon them."

"Count Golovin's agent made some inquiries in the village about Prince Ilinsky's treatment of his serfs, and he found that the state of things was frightful."

"All I can say is, that many of these serfs are exceedingly provoking and troublesome," said Anna.

"Count Golovin is determined to protect the poor wretches. He has been pestering me about it the whole of this past year. Plague take the man! He worries the life out of me."

"And what have you done?"

"I have managed, till now, to put him off

with vague promises. But he tells me, this morning, that he will be trifled with no longer ; in short, that, if Prince Ilinsky is not punished, he will resign."

"And what are you going to do?"

"I am so bothered between the two, that I scarcely know what to do. The —— take them both! Here has Prince Ilinsky, too, been with me this morning, threatening fire and vengeance. If he were a poor devil of a small landowner, I should quietly hand him over to Count Golovin's justice. Being what he is, he may do us a world of mischief."

There was silence for a few moments, and then Anna spoke, in an earnest tone which quite deceived the Prime Minister :

"Count Golovin is a glorious man," she said ; "but it seems to me that you find him a very troublesome master—servant, I should have said."

Anna had touched a sore point, and the Prime Minister winced unmistakably.

"Yes, he is troublesome at times," he answered, groaning inwardly at the thought : "and the worst of it is, that he gets romantic notions into his head, and nothing I can say can beat them out of him."

Anna's green-grey, cat-like eyes had been jealously watching Prime Minister's face. She saw that she had hit upon a fruitful soil, and she made up her mind to till it thoroughly. She went on to speak of Count Golovin in a tone of admiration which would have deceived most people :

“He is too great a man to act as a servant under any man,” she said. “He was made to be master wherever he went. What a glorious Prime Minister he would make !”

Anna must have studied Count Baranovitch carefully, and known his weaknesses by heart. Her cunning speech roused him up into a wild fit of jealousy. Never before had he felt so strong a wish to get rid of Count Golovin.

“I sometimes think that he fancies himself Prime Minister already !” he cried, grinding his teeth with rage.

Anna was playing with him as the cat plays with the mouse.

“And well he might,” she continued, heaping fuel on the raging fire. “Men will find their level, you know. He, who is made to be master, *will* be master : your *calling* him a servant will not *make* him one. If he is a master in right, he will be a master in fact.”

"The —— take him!" exclaimed Count Baranovitch, unable to control himself any longer.

"Count Golovin will command, wherever you may place him. Ah, he is a glorious man!"

"The worst of it is, one can't get rid of him!"

At this point, Anna put forth perhaps the highest effort of her genius in the histrionic line. She stared at Count Baranovitch in seeming astonishment and alarm.

"Get rid of him!" she cried. "What are you talking about? Get rid of *Count Golovin*! Did I hear you aright?"

"Well, child—and suppose you did?"

"Why, what could you do without him?"

"Ay, that's just it! There isn't another man in Russia who could handle the secret police as he does."

"Do you mean to say seriously that you would get rid of him, if you could?" asked Anna with an air of doubt.

"If I could find another man to take his place."

"I never was more astonished in all my life! How long has your Highness wished it?"

"For some time past."

"I scarcely know what to say—I am so

taken by surprise. And yet I don't know that I ought to be surprised: it can't be a very pleasant thing to have a master for a servant—certainly not.”

“He gives himself the airs of a master too!”

“I am so bewildered by this strange confession of yours, that—— Will you give me a few minutes just to collect my scattered wits?” said Anna, in the most helpless tone.

“Certainly, my child.”

Anna put her hand to her forehead, and seemed to be “collecting her scattered wits,” as a hen collects her scattered chickens. Tchook, tchook! After a few minutes' pause, she said:

“I frankly confess that I am in a strait between two. Count Golovin is a glorious man; and there is no man living whom I admire so much. But, still, I do not love him as I love you; and, if I could do anything to help you, I would with all my heart.”

“Thank you, my child.”

“The great thing is to find some one who could take Count Golovin's place: is it not, your Highness?”

“That's the point.”

“A man as able, but more yielding?”

“There is no such man.”

“ I am not so sure of that.”

The Prime Minister looked doubtfully at the handsome coquette, as if he thought she might be trifling with him ; but finding a thoughtful look on her face, and remembering how often he had proved her resources unfailing, he felt a new hope springing up.

“ If you found me such a man, I would give my whole being up to you,” he answered with energy.

“ I think I know such a man,” said Anna, quietly and thoughtfully : “ Prince Gregory Ilinsky.”

“ I have thought of him ; but he is not equal to Golovin.”

“ Who is ?”

Working the former vein, you see.

“ If we were living in ordinary times, I should appoint him to the post,” continued the count ; “ but there are dangers ahead, and we want the strongest man we can get.”

“ It was of those very dangers that I was thinking. It was he who supplied Count Golovin with a good deal of his information about the *Union*.”

Anna spoke so firmly, that Count Baranovitch was staggered.

“He has been bragging to you, I suppose.”

“No, I first heard of it from another quarter; but, when I spoke to him, he could not deny it.”

“Who told you?”

“I am not at liberty to inform your Highness,” answered Anna: “it was told me in confidence. Ask Count Golovin himself: he is too honourable a man to deny the truth.”

“You astonish me!” exclaimed Count Baranovitch. “I never dreamt of such a thing.”

“It was Prince Gregory that informed Count Golovin of the meeting of delegates on the 7th of June, last year; and he has supplied Count Golovin with news, from time to time, ever since.”

“He has never hinted this to me.”

“He is too close for that.”

“Well, *I am* surprised! Count Golovin go to Prince Gregory for information!” exclaimed the Prime Minister. “This throws a new light on the whole affair.”

His respect for Prince Gregory was rising fast; and his respect for Count Golovin was falling at an equal rate. They were the two buckets in an old-fashioned well—as the one rose, the other *must* fall. Might not Prince

Gregory prove, in every sense, a better chief of the secret police than Count Golovin?

"Ask Count Golovin himself," continued Anna.

"I will. But now, my child, what would you advise me to do in this affair of Prince Ilinsky's?"

"Consent to Count Golovin's demand," answered Anna, smiling at her success thus far: "but then, you know, you can appoint any one you like to conduct the investigation; and you can give him what instructions you like."

"In fact, I can make the whole thing a farce?"

"Exactly," answered Anna, laughing aloud. "Your Highness has grasped my meaning with your wonted sagacity. Give Prince Ilinsky to understand that it is a farce; and that will quiet him, you know."

But the count was far from being satisfied.

"That is all very well," he said: "but Golovin will be the first to find out that it is a farce; and what am I to do then?"

"Time enough to think of that. If the investigation is properly conducted," and Anna smiled, "it will be months before Golovin can find it out; and who knows what may happen

in the meanwhile? By that time you may have satisfied yourself that Prince Gregory is competent to take his place."

"True."

"At all events, they will cease tormenting you for the present; and you will gain time to think about the future. If the worst come to the worst, you can throw the blame on the gentleman who conducted the investigation: and then you will be no worse off than now; but you will have gained all that precious time."

"Well, you are a splendid woman!" exclaimed Baranovitch, unable to conceal his admiration.

"I am sorry for Count Golovin, though: he is a glorious man; the greatest man we have in Russia. But, for your sake, I am willing to make even that sacrifice."

And she looked bewitching. Wisest to keep on good terms with Prime Minister, till Majesty was actually at her feet!

"You deserve the high consideration in which his Majesty evidently holds you," continued Count Baranovitch.

And he devoured the handsome coquette with his eyes.

"You flatterer!" cried Anna, looking more bewitching than ever.

By a natural law of association, the mention of Majesty's regard for Anna reminded the Prime Minister of the letter with which he had been intrusted.

"By-the-bye," he said, "his Majesty charged me with a letter for you."

"Indeed!" answered Anna carelessly.

Count Baranovitch looked at Anna meaningly, as he handed the letter. He could see nothing but an expression of utter indifference; whereas, if he could have pierced through the mask she wore, he would have seen her heart in a tumult of triumph. He watched her closely as she read the letter; but it might have been her washerwoman's bill for any feeling that it seemed to awaken. Not to be caught tripping twice in one day!

"What does his Majesty deign to say?" asked the count, his curiosity overcoming his politeness.

"Oh, nothing particular!" answered Anna carelessly.

But in her heart of hearts the trumpets were already sounding; and the car of triumph was half-way up the Via Sacra. Well might Anna's

heart throb with triumph ! Alexander, in the letter, begged her "to grant him a private interview in his cabinet, that afternoon, in reference to the delicate subject on which they had conversed the day before." How Anna longed to be alone for a moment, to give vent to her overmastering sense of exultation ! It almost seemed as if she had wings, and were floating in the air, so buoyant was she with hope. At last !

She was brought back to the realities of the present by a question from the count. In courtier style, very unusual in his intercourse with Anna, he asked :

"May I peruse the august imperial communication ?"

Anna was perplexed. She did not want to show the letter. But, if she did not, would not Prime Minister fill his silly old head with all kinds of surmises ? Might he not even surround her with a crowd of spies ? Best be on good terms with highness, till Majesty was actually at her feet !

"Well," she said at last, "it does not seem right to show his Majesty's letters to a third party ; but to an old friend like you I can deny nothing." And here she put on her most win-

ning smile. "The fact is, I had some conversation with his Majesty on a delicate subject yesterday; and his Majesty wishes to renew that conversation."

Surmises! Why, all kinds of surmises now filled the "silly old head." Yesterday! The very time that rumour spoke about! Hastily, eagerly, as if clutching at the "subject," he asked:

"And what was that subject?"

Anna knew that question would come; and she had been dressing and cooking "a delicate subject" that would serve the turn. So she answered without hesitation, and with a face of brass:

"It was whether anything could absolve a monarch from the vows he had taken at his coronation to govern the empire."

Anna had fixed on this particular "delicate subject," because she knew that the thought of "abdication" was often on the Emperor's mind. The Prime Minister's doubts and surmises were laid to rest at once. Anna's answer had been so prompt, and there was so much seeming frankness in the way in which she put the letter into his hands, that, when he read it, all looked simple and natural.

“And what was his Majesty’s opinion?” he asked.

“That there were circumstances, such as physical or mental incapacity, which might exonerate a man from the responsibility.”

The very arguments which Majesty had used !

“And what did you say to that?”

“I thought, your Highness, that if there were no such reservations made in the vows themselves, nothing but death could absolve him,” answered Anna, glibly enough.

She was hoping earnestly, all the time, that this cross-questioning would soon cease; because she really did not know how much longer she could invent the imaginary conversation off-hand.

“Capital !” cried Baranovitch with an outburst of joy.

“Do you fancy I was not thinking of *you* all the time ?” said Anna softly, with a bewitching smile.

“Of me !”

“Ay: the reign of his Majesty, Alexander the First, Emperor, and that of his highness, Count Baranovitch, Chief Minister, would most probably terminate about the same time.”

“Ha, ha, ha! So you are going to renew the discussion? I hope you will convince his Majesty.”

And the Prime Minister went away. He did not for a moment suspect that the handsome coquette had been hoodwinking him.

As soon as Count Baranovitch was out of hearing, Anna burst into a loud fit of laughter, and gave vent to her long pent-up feelings.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PRIVATE INTERVIEW.

“ For see you not, dear love,
That such a mood as that, which lately gloom'd
Your fancy when you saw me following you,
Must make me feel still more you are not mine,
Must make me yearn still more to prove you mine,
And make me wish still more to learn this charm
Of woven paces and of waving hands,
As proof of trust?”

TENNYSON: *The Idylls of the King.*

I WISH I could give you some idea of the feeling of triumph with which Anna went to Alexander's private cabinet that afternoon. She was about to realise the highest object of her ambition! Any doubt about it? She must be a fool to doubt! The Emperor was about to acknowledge himself her slave. His eager looks; his deep sighs; the pointed way in which he had asked her if *she* knew any lady who could share his sorrows and his cares;—all showed that this was the meaning of his letter. The summit of her ambition was gained: in a few minutes Majesty would be at her feet; and, in a few months, all Russia would bow before her power!

This had been her cherished aim for some time ; and the talk, which we overheard, was only the last of a series of conversations which had passed between the Emperor and herself. Conversations always in public. But what of that ? They could retire to some corner, where none durst follow them. And even if they were within earshot ? Anna had long learnt to master difficulties of that kind. She could convey a meaning in a word which none but the right person could understand. And now, at last, he was going to grant her a “private interview !” It was but the last step to her becoming in fact, though not in name, Empress of Russia !

Young as she was, she had already acquired no small share of power in the government of the country. Whenever she chose to wield her power, Count Baranovitch was her ready tool. Many a measure, which was thought to be the offspring of his wisdom or his folly, had really sprung from her fruitful brain. But she had long been weary of him ; had long felt it humbling to her pride to coax and wheedle where she was born to command. All that was over now. The tables were turned. His master would soon be at her feet ; and he himself

would, of course, be her slave. If he kicked against the pricks, she would simply kick *him* out of the way—in the most approved lady-like style!

Having arranged these points to her thorough satisfaction, Anna entered the private cabinet. She found the Emperor sitting there in his easy-chair. He rose gallantly enough to receive her, and handed her a seat. Well, he looked a trifle too grave and serious for so joyous an encounter. But, after all, that was a matter of taste. Perhaps he meant to woo her in a pious way! At length he spoke. Ah, it was coming at last!

“Your Highness must see that this business is too delicate to be transacted before a third party,” he said, in a strange, awkward manner.

“Certainly, your Majesty.”

And Anna brought her whole battery of looks and smiles and tones to bear upon Majesty.

“That must be my apology, your Highness, for seeking this private interview.”

“I see no need for any apology,” answered Anna with a bewitching smile: “your Majesty has only to command; and I should feel it my duty to obey.”

“I wanted your Highness to understand why I wished it to be private,” continued Alexander.

Still harping on that string! What did it mean? How could the interview be anything but private? He surely would not make love to her before the whole court?

“How cold and formal he is!” thought Anna.

The Emperor went on to say:

“Oh, your Highness, if you should be the means of restoring peace to my wounded spirit, I shall have reason to thank God.”

“What a singular wooing!” thought Anna.

“I see how it is. We must woo religiously, keep up appearances, make love in the orthodox style. See if I don’t fit your canting moods!”

“Your Highness,” said Alexander solemnly, “I believe that you are the instrument which God has appointed to comfort my troubled heart.”

“Decidedly!” thought Anna.

“I pray that the object which lies nearest to my heart may be accomplished through your instrumentality.”

Was this the pious way of making love;—the true orthodox style? Rather dull and prosy,—eh? So thought Anna. But, in spite of the dulness, she was mightily amused.

After all, it was a study of human nature. She had never come into contact with a man like Alexander before; and, much as she had studied him, she had not yet fathomed his nature, and was scarcely prepared for such a strange exhibition of manhood. But she tried to adapt herself to his humour; to "fit his canting moods," as she had said.

"All your Majesty's subjects must feel that their first duty, next to God, is to yourself," she answered, putting on her most saint-like look; "in fact, that it is alike their privilege and their duty to love, worship, and obey you."

Ah, she had not fathomed him yet! Doubtful whether she even understood the meekness which led him to say, in a tone of the greatest earnestness:

"No, your Highness; for it is written, 'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve.'"

"I can consider no sacrifice too great to secure your Majesty's happiness," continued Anna: "I should deem it a religious duty to give up father, mother, husband, all, for the sake of securing your comfort and joy."

"I thank you from the bottom of my heart."

“Oh, your Majesty, if I could be the means, in any way, of procuring you peace of mind, I myself would thank God for my own sake as well as for yours,” continued Anna, adding to herself: “There now! I hope he is satisfied with that.”

“Your Highness spoke yesterday of a lady who could cheer me in my lonely hours,” said the Emperor, after a short pause, looking eagerly at Anna: “doubtless you were thinking of the same lady as myself.”

Anna blushed, and looked very charming indeed, as she answered in a pretty, coquettish way:

“I should not be at all surprised.”

There was another pause, after which Alexander eagerly asked:

“Does your Highness think there is any hope of my winning her?”

Anna blushed again, but did not speak this time. Her silence to be construed as a lady’s “No!”

“What a roundabout way of making love!” she thought, really amused, and laughing inwardly.

The Emperor waited a moment for her answer, and, seeing that none was forthcoming, said:

"Your Highness does not speak."

"It is such a delicate subject!" answered Anna coquettishly, hanging down her head, and fixing her eyes on the tessellated floor.

"So it is, your Highness; and believe me, if I could have thought of a better way, I should not have troubled your Highness with this interview."

"What does he mean?" thought Anna.

"But, from what your Highness knows of the lady, can you give me any hope?"

Anna lifted up her eyes at last, and looked the Emperor full in the face.

"From what I know of the lady," she answered, throwing as much reverence and love as she could at the moment summon into her look, "I should say that she would be glad to do anything to secure your Majesty's peace of mind."

"You gladden my heart," said Alexander, smiling at last: "will your Highness convey her a message from me?"

"With all my heart."

Coming to the point at last!

"Will you ask her to grant me a private interview?" continued Alexander earnestly.

What did it all mean? Were they not holding their "private interview" at that

very moment? What need for another? The handsome, clever, shallow coquette was utterly bewildered!

"I do not quite understand your Majesty," she said.

The clearing up of the mystery came soon enough.

"As your Highness is one of her ladies-in-waiting," answered the Emperor, "I could think of no one more suitable to convey my message to her Majesty."

So, then, all he had been aiming at was to employ her as a go-between to bring husband and wife together! Overcome by the shock, Anna for a moment dropped the mask from her face. She suddenly grew pale, and then as suddenly glowed afresh. Her eyes flashed fire; and, in the excitement of the moment, she rose from her chair, drew up her figure, and cast a withering look of scorn on the bewildered Emperor. Did he mean to make a cat's-paw of her? Hah! He would find himself mistaken! The blow had come upon her so suddenly and so crushingly that, for a moment, she lost all control over herself; and the next moment there would have been a fearful outburst of wrath.

But she suddenly checked herself: with a strong effort of will, she mastered her rage, or, at least, dammed it up within her bosom. Her first impulse, to refuse the task with scorn, had given way to other thoughts. If *she* declined it, it might be intrusted to another, who would, perhaps, accomplish it successfully; whereas, so long as it was in her own hands, she could turn it to any issue she chose—might, indeed, so manage it as to widen the breach between husband and wife. And then! She, therefore, summoned all her histrionic powers to her help in this dire emergency; and, first of all, she carefully adjusted the mask on her face again. Then she made it play all the varying expressions which were needful for her purpose. She went through all the stages of wonder, and so forth, which were needed for an easy journey from scorn to reverence and loyal obedience.

“Forgive me, your Majesty,” she said at length: “I was so taken by surprise, that I was scarcely mistress of myself for a moment. But it is over now, and I gladly accept the task.”

Alexander had been watching her narrowly: with amazement, and something akin to shud-

dering dread. Was this the saint-like princess who had so strangely won his confidence?

"I thought, for a moment, that you looked on me with undisguised scorn," he said.

"I would not disguise any of my feelings from your Majesty," answered Anna meekly.

"I will not conceal that, at the thought of your wishing any one to come as a mediator between her Majesty and yourself, a feeling of scorn did take possession of my soul. The tie between husband and wife is so sacred, that it seemed to me a sacrilege for any third party to intervene. But, when I remember the sad history of the past—oh, your Majesty, how shall I express myself?"

"Ah!"

"And now I can only feel thankful that the providence of God seems to have appointed me the humble instrument for healing the wounds of the past," said Anna.

And she left the room with meek reverence. Before visiting the Empress, she went to her own room, wishing to calm herself down. Once in her own boudoir, she gave way to an uncontrolled burst of anger. It was really dreadful, the way in which she paced backward and forward, and stamped the floor in her

rage. And there seemed to be cause enough. All her clever plans knocked on the head ; her schemes of ambition and revenge as far as ever from accomplishment. She had been made a fool of ; or, rather, had succeeded beautifully in making a fool of herself. But she would have her way yet ! She a woman to be beaten ! Not she ! She should like to see the man, were he count or emperor, who could baffle her in the long run !

And then her thoughts turned to Alexander. " Fool ! " she cried. " Dotard ! Canting hypocrite ! So, all this time, you were wanting to make a cat's-paw of me ! I'll match you yet ! I'll give your whining message to your snivelling wife, and see that it is properly delivered too ! Trust me for teaching her the proper way in which to receive such a message ! If she does not look upon it as an insult, never give me credit any more for clever management ! He has delivered himself into my hands ! We shall see if he can make a cat's-paw of *me* ! But let me see : how am I to set about it ? " Anna reflected for a moment, and then suddenly exclaimed : " Charming ! The very thing ! " And she bounded forward with joy.

She went up to a writing-table which stood

in a corner of the room, unlocked a small desk that was on it, and brought out the letter which the Emperor had written to her in the morning. With this letter in her hand, she went to the Empress, and found her sitting among her ladies. Might she see her Majesty alone? Certainly. Elizabeth, with her usual courtesy, dismissed her ladies, and awaited Anna's business. Anna had never been a favourite with the gentle and guileless wife; and the last few days had certainly not raised her in Elizabeth's eyes.

"I have received this letter from his Majesty," said Anna, holding it up in her hand; "and I feel compelled by my conscience to lay it before your Majesty."

Poor Elizabeth felt very uneasy at this strange beginning. But she replied firmly:

"I have no wish to see any of the letters which his Majesty may think fit to address to any of his subjects."

"Ah, but this one is expressed in such warm and tender language," rejoined Anna, "that I feel bound by my faithfulness to your Majesty——"

The Empress at once thought of the painful scene which she had witnessed the day before.

Poor long-suffering wife, she turned deadly pale, and felt sick at heart. She cut short Anna's speech by saying :

"I tell you I do not wish to see it."

Anna smiled in triumph: her clever plan was working beautifully.

"In this letter, his Majesty requests a private interview with me," she continued : "now I wish to know if your Majesty thinks that I do right in granting it. A private interview, too, on a delicate subject."

The poor Empress shook like a leaf.

"Your Highness may consult your own sense of duty," she answered indignantly : "I am the last person in the world to consult on such a subject."

She spoke as calmly as she could. But she did not succeed in hiding her feelings: the inner fire would blaze out.

"Well, your Majesty, I acceded to his request," continued Anna in an impudent manner; "and I have just had a long and private interview with his Majesty in his private cabinet."

"What is all this to me?"

"I thought it only due to your Majesty that you should know it."

“I wish to know nothing about it.”

“Your Majesty need not be jealous,” Anna went on to say with the most brazen-faced impudence, keenly watching the working of her poison; “because his Majesty wishes to have a private interview with *you* too, and has charged me to request it.”

Surely human nature could have borne no more. The Empress had been trained in the school of sorrow; had been softened and subdued, till all believed her to be as meek as a lamb. But she must have sunk below the dignity of a woman and a wife, if she had bowed the neck to such an insult without a touch of resentment. She fired up, and spoke more harshly than she had done for years.

“Go, tell his Majesty,” she said, “that, when he chooses to insult me, he ought to find a worthier messenger.”

Anna could not hide the triumph which she felt. Much she cared for what her Majesty thought of her! But to have goaded the meek and gentle Elizabeth into such a strong utterance, *was* a triumph.

“I am much obliged to your Majesty for the compliment,” she answered, dropping a low

curtsy. "Am I to tell his Majesty that you refuse to grant his request?"

"Decidedly."

Anna had gained her end. She dropped another low curtsy, and majestically sailed out of the room.

In great glee, she went back to the Emperor's cabinet, where Alexander was quietly awaiting her. But, before she opened the door, she managed to put a new mask upon her face; one which the Emperor had never seen before, and might see now with advantage to her higher aim. She was in tears, and wore a look of mingled sympathy and grief.

"Oh, your Majesty!" she cried.

But there she stopped, and burst into tears afresh. Her utterance was choked: she could not speak for sobbing.

"I see you have not succeeded in your mission," said Alexander sadly.

"Oh, if that were all!"

The Emperor was somewhat startled.

"What does your Highness mean?"

"As far as I am personally concerned," answered Anna, as fast as sobs would let her, "I glory in receiving insults in your Majesty's service; and I would willingly submit to con-

tempt and disgrace, if I could thus secure your Majesty's happiness."

"Has her Majesty insulted you, then?"

"Her Majesty says that you should find a worthier messenger than I; and, God knows, your Majesty might easily find thousands worthier than I. But, if I know my own heart aright, you will not find one more loyally devoted to your Majesty."

And Anna sobbed aloud.

"I am sorry your Highness has met with insult in delivering my message," said the Emperor.

"Oh, that is nothing, your Majesty: I am almost sorry I have mentioned it. It seems selfish to think of my own petty grievances, when your Majesty's share of wrong is so much greater."

"Ah!"

A dark shade passed over the Emperor's face. He rose from the chair in which he had been sitting, and paced the room in great excitement. But there was no sign of anger about him. Anna thought he received the insult very tamely; far too tamely for the accomplishment of her plan. She felt he needed an extra touch or two of the spur.

"Her Majesty was very violent against you."

"I deserve it all!"

It was touching to see how meekly the Emperor of all the Russias acted and spoke!

"I doubt whether she even respects you."

"Ah!" exclaimed Alexander, standing still for a moment. Then he added in a low tone: "Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth! God is just! God is just!"

"Whining old dotard!" thought Anna.

The Emperor continued aloud:

"I owe her reparation: and it shall be made; yes, the amplest atonement in my power. I am only sorry that I have to set out so soon on my journey to the south. I shall be away for many days."

"Thank goodness!" thought Anna, overjoyed at the news. "I shall have time to work out my plan."

"In the meanwhile, your Highness," added Alexander, coming up to Anna, and looking anxiously into her face, "I feel sure that I may rely upon you to use all your efforts to soothe her Majesty's mind."

"Your Majesty may rely on me."

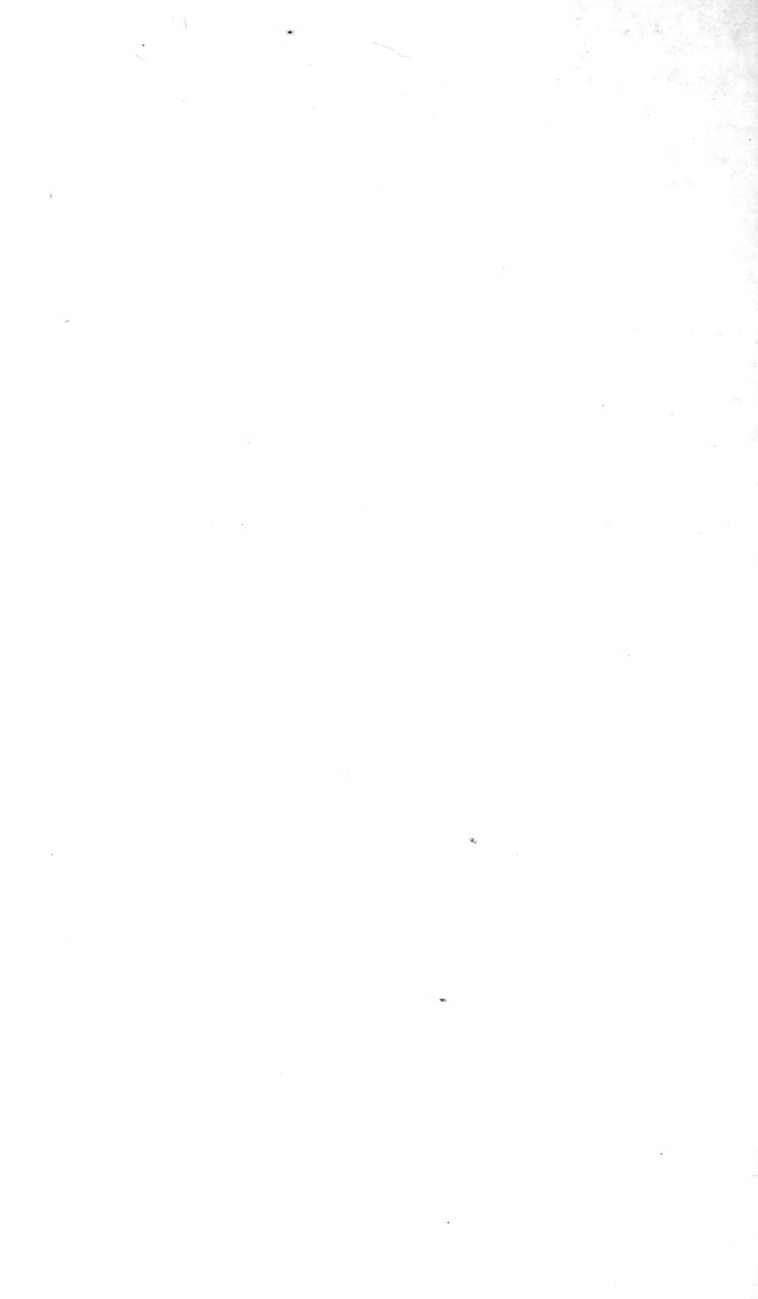
At this moment Anna found it a somewhat hard task to keep down her inclination to laugh.

But the task was not needed long. The “private interview” was soon over, and Anna went her way to widen the breach between husband and wife. As soon as she returned to her own room, she burst into a fit of wild uncontrollable laughter. Her plan for retrieving her false step had succeeded to perfection !

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